

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

The Vanishing Professor

by

Fred
MacIsaac

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JANUARY 9

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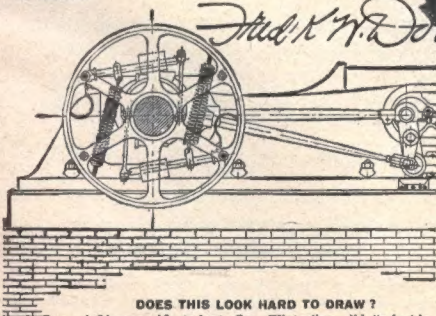


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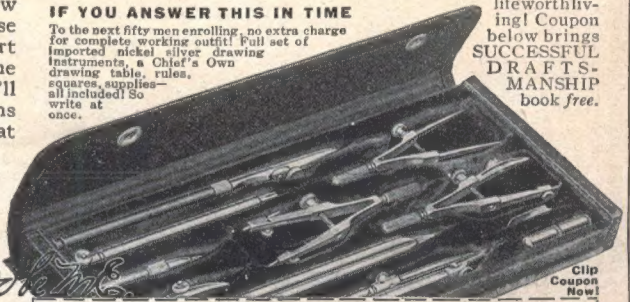
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ARGOSY-WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXIV

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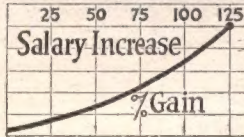


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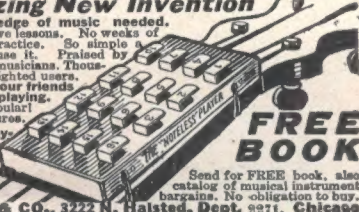
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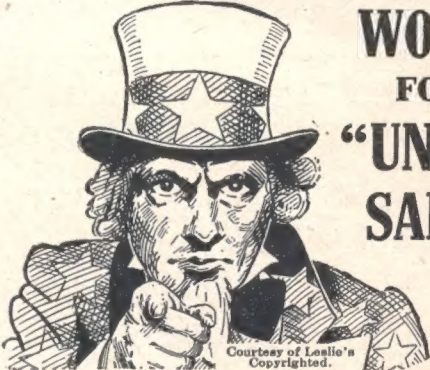
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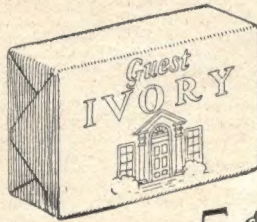
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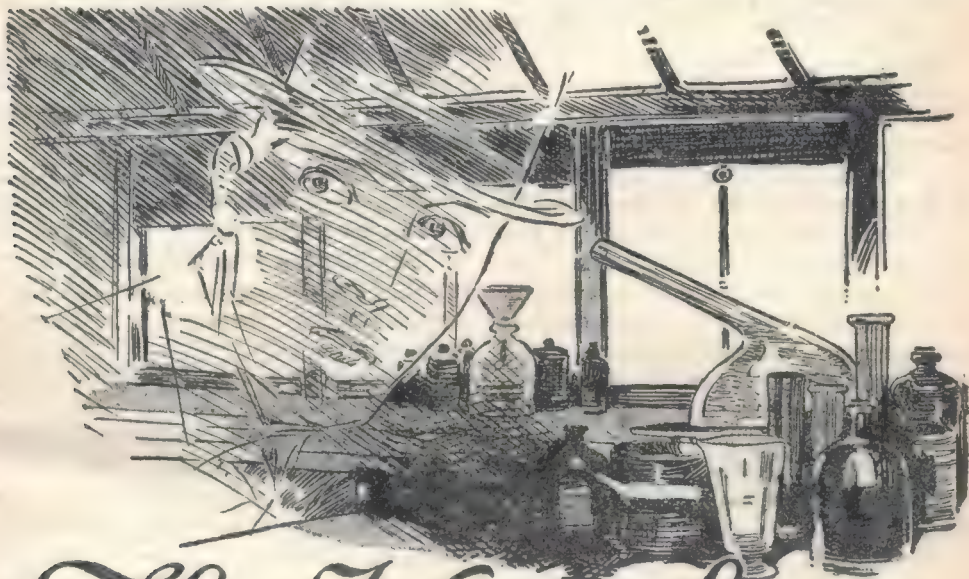
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The Vanishing Professor

By **FRED MACISAAC**

Author of "The Mad Movie," "The Gleaming Blade," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE BLACK BOX.

IT was evident that Professor Frank Leonard, occupant of the chairs of physics and chemistry at Omega College, was furious about something, by the way he slammed the front door when he entered his apartment.

The distinguished scientist was only twenty-eight, a stalwart, keen, aggressive

chap, whose weight in football days had been one hundred and seventy-two, whose time for the hundred yards was just over ten seconds. After his name he could write Ph.D., a degree granted him by one of the biggest universities in the country. He was considered one of the coming men in his line, and he had been a full professor at Omega for three years. For all of which he earned twenty-four hundred dollars per year.

And the reason that he was indignant was because he had come directly from the president of the university, who had just refused to raise his salary a few hundred a year.

The president had been very considerate, had praised his work warmly, but he regretted that the financial condition of the college was such that the expenses of the professor's department could not be increased.

In other words, nothing doing.

Thus the mood of the learned young professor when he slammed his front door was black, he scowled when he observed that his sitting room had an occupant, but his face cleared when he realized that it was Professor Ewing of political economy. Ewing was only two years older, also possessed a doctor's degree, and his record in his subject was enviable. Omega had a reputation for securing more brilliant professors for less money than any college in the country.

"Any luck?" asked Ewing, who knew the purpose of Leonard's call upon the head of the institution.

"Hello, Bill," Leonard retorted with grim good nature. "I learned that I am even a greater man than I thought I was, but I discovered that old Omega hasn't another penny for chemistry and physics; much as old Prexy would hate to lose a genius like myself, he wouldn't pay five hundred dollars a year more to hold me. What price culture in this precious country?"

"It's the devil, old man. You know I'm married, and my three thousand a year doesn't enable me to give my poor wife decent clothes, let alone myself. This is the third year on this suit, and I'll have to cut all functions demanding evening clothes because my dress things are too shabby."

"What are you going to do about it?"

Ewing shrugged his shoulders. "What can I do? I have given hostages to fortune. I owe money. I have tried to land a better job, but the woods are full of fellows as qualified as myself who are willing to take less money. I'll just have to plug along. If I were single I could do nicely with your salary."

"Is that so?" asked Leonard as he seated himself and filled a blackened clay pipe. "I expect to marry some day, but I certainly have no right to ask a cultured girl to share what I can offer her. What a wonderful state of affairs it is when they pay a professor less than a day laborer! Do you know that a milkman can make sixty dollars a week, a truck driver seventy-five, a carpenter ninety, a bricklayer or a mason a hundred dollars? There is hardly a trade whose journeymen do not earn more than I do, while unskilled ditch-diggers get seventy-five cents an hour."

"Too true, but we couldn't do that sort of work. We wouldn't be happy except in our own professions."

"But what an absurd situation, to permit the best educated and most intelligent members of the community to be the worst paid!"

"Criminal. But, after all, there are other things than money."

"I begin to wonder," retorted Professor Leonard. "America worships the calf of gold. It is the only badge of success. The rising generation of girls only see the men who can afford to give them a good time. Do you know what it costs in New York to take a girl to dinner, to the theater, to a dance place afterward, and home?"

"I'm married, thank God! I don't have to worry about those things."

"I'll tell you. Ten dollars for dinner, fifteen dollars for theater tickets, fifteen or twenty dollars for supper at a good place; figure fifty dollars for an evening's entertainment—more than I earn in a week."

"Don't go around with expensive girls. I suppose you are thinking of Tom Ransome's daughter. I saw you making up to her when she came down with the old man to the last commencement."

"And why shouldn't I become friends with Tom Ransome's daughter? He was expelled from college thirty years ago for stupidity. He became a contractor, now he is worth a million or two, and lives on Fifth Avenue. Why should not a college professor be considered good enough by Tom Ransome to call at his house, even to marry his daughter?"

"Because she spends more for silk stockings in a year than you earn."

"But I should be paid proportionately to my attainments."

"Then take your attainments to a better market. What's the use of going over this continually, old man?"

"Because I want money—lots of money—and I intend to get it."

"Hurray for you. Get some for me."

"In a state of society which penalizes learning, I see no reason why men of our type and condition should regard laws and regulations obviously unjust."

"They'd put a professor in jail as quick as the next one, if he broke the law."

"What sheep we are to permit them to herd us the way they do. Do you realize what a man of great learning and no conscience could do to society if he tried? We are the most dangerous people in the world and the worst paid."

"Thinking of turning your hand against society? Beware, young fellow! Society has a way of capturing and incarcerating geniuses who go wrong."

"Yes? Well, I stumbled upon something recently—" He stopped abruptly.

"You don't say?" asked the other, greatly interested. "What?"

Leonard looked confused. "I'll tell you when I know more about it."

Ewing rose, extinguished his cigarette, held out his hand. "I'm darn sorry Prexy turned you down, old man. But another year things may be different. I happen to know he will have a dreadful time meeting his budget this year."

"Thanks, Bill. I doubt if I'll stay another year. I am sick of this continual pinching and economizing."

"Put that girl out of your mind. She'll marry some steel magnate."

"Not if I see him coming."

Ewing looked at him pityingly. "I can't wish you worse luck than to marry a girl like that and bring her to college to live on a professor's income. My own wife came out of a comfortable home, and it breaks my heart to see how she has to scrimp and scrape to make both ends meet."

"Don't you worry about my income. I'll attend to it."

"Well, I wish you luck."

After Ewing left, Professor Leonard went into his bathroom, which he had equipped, since it happened to be an unusually large bathroom, as a home laboratory, and began to busy himself with several curious instruments. He worked for half an hour, then emerged with a strange smile upon his face.

Under his arm he carried a little black leather box about eight inches by six by four.

When he passed out of his front door he said aloud:

"They had their chance. Now it's my turn."

As Professor Leonard passed down the street toward the town, Policeman Jack Hibbard came around the corner of a side street about a hundred yards away. He saw Professor Leonard coming toward him, walking briskly. He noticed the professor take the box from under his arm, and then he didn't see him at all.

Hibbard stared, rubbed his eyes, but the street was vacant ahead of him. He stopped short in his astonishment. What a curious trick his eyes had played him! He would have sworn he had seen a man ahead of him who looked like Professor Leonard, and he hadn't. He was cold sober—he happened to be a teetotaler—so it was no vagary of bootleg liquor. It must be that there was something the matter with his head; perhaps he was growing crazy!

And as he stood there in rising alarm he heard footsteps on the pavement pass by him, though there wasn't a pedestrian in sight.

The poor policeman leaned against the fence, so weak he could hardly keep on his feet. He looked behind him to see if any one else had observed the phenomenon. Another witness would save him from insanity. And then he saw the back of a man a hundred feet away, a man who carried a little black box under his arm, and who looked like Professor Leonard.

It was too much for poor Hibbard's none too alert intellect. Professor Leonard had been a hundred feet in front of him, and was now a hundred feet behind him; he had vanished and reappeared; he had

passed while invisible. Or else Jack Hibbard should not be a patrolman; he should be behind the high wall of an asylum. He recovered himself and hastened after the professor, who was walking rapidly, so that the officer had to run to overtake him. When he came abreast of him he mumbled:

"Hello, professor."

"Why, how do you do, Hibbard?"

"Excuse me—er—but did you pass me by just now?"

"I really did not notice, officer. I was absorbed in a problem in chemistry."

"Well, did you come straight down this street?"

Professor Leonard smiled at him enigmatically. "Why, yes, I did."

"Er—thank you, professor."

Officer Hibbard went straight home and took to his bed, while his wife telephoned to the chief of police that he had been taken ill on patrol and had been compelled to come home. Then she gave him castor oil and put a hot water bottle on his chest, to both of which unpleasant things he submitted without complaint.

Meanwhile, Professor Leonard retraced his steps, reëntered his lodgings, sat at his desk and wrote the following letter, which was addressed to the president of the college:

At the end of the session, June 2, I wish to resign the chair of chemistry and physics in Omega, as it is impossible for me to live upon the salary I now receive, and which you profess yourself unable to increase. I have enjoyed my association with the college and yourself, and you have my best wishes for the future of Omega.

He signed it with a flourish, sealed and addressed its envelope, and leaned back with the same curious smile on his face which had sent the policeman home to bed.

The resignation of Professor Leonard caused a sensation at Omega. Few among the faculty believed that he was serious; that a young man who had the honor to be a full professor should throw up his post, admitting, as he did, that he had no better offer from any other institution of learning, was hardly credible.

In this country, without an official aris-

tocracy, there have grown up half a dozen groups of aristocrats whose self-esteem is none the less arrogant because their superiority is generally unacknowledged.

There are the military and naval class which believes that it contains the finest ingredients in the nation, the newspaper and literary coterie which admires itself hugely, the moneyed element which possesses also some claim to birth and breeding, and the academic group which is sure it owns a monopoly of the nation's brains.

The pride of the last class is best evidenced by the fact that rising costs of living set against its stationary scale of emolument have reduced it from one of the better paid to one of the worst remunerated professions without causing enough desertions from its ranks to be noticeable. And it is probable that the reward of the professorial caste might be reduced until it was absolutely the poorest paid in the whole land without disrupting the organizations of the colleges.

In the city of Omega, in which the college was located, men who tended furnaces and men who paved the street brought home to their families a larger weekly wage than most instructors and some of the professors, but the scholars still demanded and received obeisance from the working classes of the town.

So the attitude of Professor Leonard in refusing to remain in the ranks because there were holes in the soles of his shoes was received with great disapprobation when it was certain that he was in earnest. His colleagues had called upon him to talk of "*esprit de corps*" and "*noblesse oblige*," and utilized other time-worn phrases without making an impression. Evidently the man was obsessed. Well, persons so mercenary were better out of the profession.

Professor Leonard went on in his classes painstakingly and methodically, made all his preparations to turn over his department to his successor when he should be appointed, advertised his lodgings for rent, packed his belongings, made it evident that he intended to shake the dust of Omega from his feet. At the last moment he refused an offer of five hundred dollars more per year.

"A month ago I would have been glad to accept it," he informed the president. "Now I have made all my plans; it is too late. I am through with teaching."

"May I ask what are your plans?"

"I had rather not explain them just at present."

"Well," said President Jeffries, a stout clergyman who had grown gray and wrinkled in ten years of begging money for Omega, though he was not much over fifty years of age, "I certainly trust you will succeed in whatever business you undertake. No one appreciates better than myself the difficulties under which our professors labor in these days of high living costs without increased incomes. It is really marvelous that the *esprit de corps* of our profession is so great that very few men who have made their mark as you have done are willing to abandon the academic groves."

"It is my earnest hope that I may secure a sufficient income so that I can afford to resume teaching and research in a college like this," replied Leonard.

"No," said the president, gravely shaking his head. "Men who go out into the world get the money lust; they rarely return. I do not expect that you will ever come back. If you do, though, Omega wants you."

They shook hands with mutual respect.

When Professor Leonard got back to his rooms he found another interview upon his hands. John Craven, a tall, mature, sharp-visaged young man who was one of the most promising students in his department and who had done a lot of research work in the laboratory under his direction, had come to pay his respects.

Leonard did not like this young man particularly. Despite great intelligence, much perseverance, an insatiable curiosity and a talent for physics, he impressed the professor as a person whose character left something to be desired. He was twenty-four years old and a senior. He had a shifty eye and a manner which was not straightforward.

"I could not leave college," said Craven, "without having a chat with you, professor. Since you are resigning, there will be no

chance of my coming back here to consult you on subjects in which we are mutually interested. May I ask where you will locate so that I can get in touch with you in the future?"

"My plans are unsettled, and I do not know what my address will be," replied Leonard evasively. "If you will leave me your address I shall drop you a line telling you where I may be found."

"Are you going to New York?"

"For a visit. Very likely I shall not remain there."

"I live in New York. I'd be glad to have you look me up. Here is my address."

He handed him a card upon which he had written, "149 West Ninety-Seventh Street."

"Ah, thank you, Craven. Thank you. Very good of you."

"I wanted to ask you, professor: have you carried those experiments of ours upon refraction any further?"

"I've been too busy. Later I may get back to them."

"Well—er—I was sorry we stopped so abruptly. They were getting interesting."

"So they were—so they were! However, they probably would have come to nothing."

"I'm not so sure," said Craven slowly. "I began to get a glimmering of an idea from them."

"I saw they were not leading in the direction I desired, so naturally I lost interest."

"Yes? The world knows very little about the possibilities of light."

"My dear boy, the world knows very little about anything."

"It would be a wonderful thing if we could see around corners."

"I'm afraid that will always be impossible."

"That's what they said about flying."

"True—true. But I am very busy now. Go on with your experiments when you leave college. Who knows what you may discover?"

"I intend to. But two workers get better results than one. Now, I would certainly appreciate it to continue experiments with

you if you should locate in New York. I have a hunch we were on the edge of something big when we quit."

"I'll get in touch with you in case I continue. But science is a series of frustrated experiments; one often thinks he has touched something only to find an error."

"Exactly what were you looking for in those experiments, professor?"

"Why—er—nothing specific—just groping in the dark. Now good-by, my boy. I really must ask you to leave."

"Oh, all right."

There was a curious look in his eyes as he went down the front steps, while Professor Leonard's manner was a trifle uneasy after he departed. But finally the young scientist shrugged his shoulders and went into his laboratory, now in the process of being dismantled.

Craven had proceeded down the street but a short distance when he fell in with Officer Hibbard, whom he knew very well.

"Hello, Jack," he said. "How are they coming?"

"Not so good, kid—not so good."

"What's the trouble?"

"I don't know exactly. Say, did you ever hear of a man's eyes going back on him so he couldn't see a thing for a minute, and then getting all right again?"

"Why, yes, that happens now and then. It means you need glasses."

"I suppose so. I hear Professor Leonard is leaving college."

"Yep, the old boy is going." To a student a professor is always old. "He's sick of starvation wages."

"He won't be missed," said Hibbard.

"No, sir. Good riddance, I say."

"What's the idea, Jack?" asked Craven in surprise. "I always understood Leonard was popular."

"I ain't saying nothing, but there's something queer about him," replied the policeman.

They had been walking down the street side by side. Craven now stopped short and laid his hand on his arm.

"Say, did Leonard have anything to do with your eyes failing you?"

Hibbard looked scared, started to speak, then shut up like a clam.

"There's nothing the matter with my eyes. I just need glasses."

"Come on, Jack. I graduate next week and leave Omega for good. What's this mystery? Cough up."

"I'm a married man, and I need my job. I can't afford to have people think I'm crazy. Run along now, young fellow; I got to turn down this street."

"What happened, old man? I won't tell."

"You won't have nothing to tell," retorted the officer as he turned up the side street. Craven's eyes were snapping with excitement. The refusal of the officer to tell his secret infuriated him, and he clenched his fists, but had too much sense to strike at the retreating policeman.

"Damn bonehead!" he muttered. "So Leonard did find something!"

CHAPTER II.

TOM RANSOME, DOCTOR OF LAWS.

THE residence of Tom Ransome was one of the least ostentatious houses in the block on East Eighty-Second Street between Fifth Avenue and Madison. It was not to be compared with the great marble pile upon the corner of the street at Fifth Avenue which belonged to a Pittsburgh steel king, nor was it in the same class with that of Josiah Whiteman, the textile mogul, on the opposite corner.

It was a white stone house with a twenty-five foot frontage, in the middle of the block, and it extended back about eighty feet. In that particular section, a man with two, three or four million dollars, while not a pauper, was certainly of no particular importance. Nevertheless the house and its contents were valued at about \$300,000.

Tom Ransome was the richest alumnus of Omega College, the majority of whose graduates felt called upon to preach or to teach. Properly speaking, he was not a graduate, as he had been dropped for poor scholarship in his second year. Although he now boasted of the degree of LL. D., it had been given him when he presented the college with seventy-five thousand dollars to build a much needed dormitory.

At the age of twenty, Ransome had taken a job with a construction gang which was building a railway, and, by hard work, attention to business, ability to think on his feet, and to take big chances, he had developed, in thirty years, to a point where he was the head of a big contracting company, which would build a bridge or a subway, a skyscraper or an apartment house cheaper and better than many other contracting companies.

He had married early and he now owned a daughter who was twenty-three years old, more beautiful than a heavy-jowled, horny-handed person like Tom had any right to expect, and so refined that the old man was compelled to leave his ordinary vocabulary on the hatrack in the hall along with his coat and hat.

To look at Tom Ransome, to-day, it would be difficult to believe that he had ever attended college. Culture had left few marks upon him. A generation of association with rough, unvarnished, hard-fisted, heavy-handed persons in the building trades had scraped off whatever polish a couple of years at a freshwater college had been able to put upon him.

He was a typical successful business man, gruff, abrupt, sharp, hard and forceful, a man whose English was as careless as his clothes, and whose manners had been contaminated by constant association with those who didn't have any.

Yet, like many men of his type, he had remembered his alma mater, not too kindly a mother to him, because she had ejected him, and he loved to appear as a patron of the institution. It soothed his vanity to return to the campus, patronize the professors who were still alive and who had disapproved of him in his youth, purchase the degree he had not had learning enough to earn, be pointed out as the wealthy benefactor of the college, make an address before the assembled faculty and student body in which he, more or less modestly, advised the youth to pattern on his example if they wished to get along in the world, and generally behave like a big frog in a small puddle.

If Omega College did not exactly approve of Tom Ransome, but swallowed him

like bitter medicine expected to benefit the always poverty stricken institution, its professors and students approved most heartily of Lucy Ransome his daughter.

Lucy was very delectable. Imagine a combination of Diana and Venus, with a trifle of Juno thrown in for good measure. She was tall and fair, she managed to curve most delightfully in the proper places without being plump, while her pale gold hair, and her round, wide, blue eyes looked out upon the world with a gaze which was partly appreciation and partly apprehension.

Her voice was soft and mellow, a rare throaty contralto. Thanks to Vassar College she was able to talk to the learned professors in a manner which persuaded them that she was wise as well as lovely. And of all the erudite faculty it was Professor Leonard who most fully realized what a sublime creature was the daughter of this burly and aggressive, not to say objectionable, contractor.

Until he met Lucy Ransome the previous commencement it had not occurred to Professor Leonard that he was one of the down-trodden. On the contrary he had assumed that he was a very fortunate young man to have attained the rank of full professor within five years of his reception of a doctor's degree from Harvard University.

While the salary was not princely, he could live on it, and he had poked about contentedly in the college laboratory, and prated on chemistry and physics to his students, with a proper appreciation of how good the gods had been to him.

Considering that Miss Ransome had spent only three days at Omega, Leonard had contrived to see a lot of her. They were introduced at a luncheon the first day. In the afternoon he had taken her for a walk to point out the objects of interest. Fifteen minutes usually sufficed for this, but he had stretched it to three hours. In the evening he had called at her hotel, and spent a couple of hours in the company of the girl and her father.

Next morning he had accidentally encountered her as she sallied forth alone to buy some postal cards and only left her when it was time for her to dress for an-

other official luncheon. At a spread in the evening he had elbowed eager students out of the way and secured several dances.

The third afternoon he had managed to take her for an auto ride and at the ball that night, which wound up the festivities, he monopolized her.

Miss Ransome had seemed rather disposed to submit to his encroachments on her time. Their conversations were absorbing; she told him all her ambitions and applauded his intentions of being the greatest authority in the world on physics. When she was departing, she permitted him to hold her hand for an unnecessarily long time and urged him to come to see her if he should visit New York.

It had been impossible for him to go to New York during the year that had elapsed, but he had ventured to write her several times and had received cordial replies.

The chief reason for the failure of the young man to visit New York was financial; he could get neither enough money together nor an adequate wardrobe. The pinch of poverty presented itself to him properly for the first time. Conscious of being unusually intelligent and particularly efficient in his profession, he realized how unfair it was that he should be paid like a bricklayer's apprentice.

Here was the most marvelous girl in the world, a girl so radiant, so rare and so perfect that every young man must feel about her as he did. Before he could have the impudence to ask her to share his lot, he must have an income several times the size of his present one, and, as the prospect of such a thing was remote, it would be necessary to take short cuts.

Every day he dawdled might be fatal. In the brilliant social career which she led in New York, it was likely that she would meet some man and agree to marry him.

And then, in the accidental manner in which most great discoveries are made, he hit upon something so amazing, so extraordinary, so full of possibilities for a man who could rise superior to conventional ethics that Professor Leonard succumbed to temptation. His visit to the president to ask for a moderate increase in salary was his final sop to his conscience.

Thus it happened when Tom Ransome entered his palatial, if over-shadowed, home one night, a week or so after the events of the preceding chapter that he found his daughter Lucy with a letter in her hand.

Hardly had he hung up his hat before she tackled him, figuratively speaking.

"Father," she began, "do you remember that nice Professor Leonard whom we met at Omega College last year?"

"Leonard. Do you mean that fellow that took up all your time during three days? Taught mathematics or spelling or something?"

"The professor of physics and chemistry."

"Well, whatever he is. What about him?"

"He is coming to New York, and I am inviting him to dinner when he arrives."

"Sure. Why not? Say, Lucy," he added as it occurred to him that she seemed especially interested. "Sit down opposite me. I want to say something."

Instead of doing as he commanded she sat herself on his knee, put one white arm about his neck and kissed him on the ear.

"My goodness!" she said, making the moue of a bad little girl. "Why the sudden seriousness?"

"Now, it's this way. You are the only daughter I've got. Your mother is dead and I have to be both parents to you, don't I?"

"Yes, dear. You do pretty well."

"Best I can. I'm a darn busy man and have to let you run around by yourself a lot. Can't be helped. But I've given you everything in the world you want, and made you pretty happy. Hey?"

"Uh-hum."

"Now, what I want to have you do is pick out the right kind of a man and marry him. I've got a lot of coin, but I'm small potatoes alongside of this New York society bunch. I'm a small town product, cut no ice with the first families, but there isn't any reason you shouldn't. I want you to be in with the best crowd, so nobody can look down on you, and with your beauty and education there isn't any reason why you shouldn't marry into the nobbiest family in New York."

"Or a duke or earl?" she proposed satirically.

"No, they're no good, at least the kind that come after American girls aren't any good; and titles are shopworn since the war. I wouldn't object to your picking out a smart young business man, but the idea would be to grab off a boy with the social entrée. Not for me, I don't want to hobnob with the Vanderbilts, but for your own sake."

"And the purpose of this little sermon is what?" asked Lucy, archly.

"Well, I don't want you getting interested in the wrong kind of fellows. Now, this what's-his-name may be all right. In Omega we had to be nice to the poor prunes of professors. In their place, fine, but one of them running around with my daughter in New York—that's something else."

Lucy got up off his lap and stood in front of him regarding him sadly.

"You, a distinguished doctor of laws of Omega College thus reflecting upon the faculty. 'Those noble men who sacrifice the material benefits of life in their zeal for the higher education of American manhood.' I am quoting your own speech at Omega last year."

"I said it and I meant it. They are O.K.—in their colleges, but when they poke their noses out into the world they get them bitten off. The trouble with college professors is that they lack guts, that's why they hide in colleges and earn a miserable salary instead of going out and bucking real life the way I do. Why, a carpenter makes more than a college professor. I bet I pay one of my steel workers twice what this friend of yours knocks down."

"I admire and respect Professor Leonard, but if those are your views, I cannot ask him to sit at your table."

"Ah, pshaw! Invite him if you want to. I don't mind a little thing like that. I only wanted you to get the right slant on these kind of people. Be polite to him, certainly. But if a poor dub like that started making love to my daughter I'd run him out."

"It seems to me with all our money we can afford to take a different attitude toward a man who is both a gentleman and a great scientist."

"What's our money got to do with it? Do you suppose I worked for thirty years building up a fortune for a slick, dictionary-eating Pelican, who don't make as much as a bookkeeper in my office, to come along and turn a girl's head and step into two or three millions when I die? How do you get that way? To make sure nobody wants you for your money you got to marry somebody richer than I am, or I'll know the reason why."

"You are a very nice father," she said with a smile which contained a shade of his own hardness. "But you are not going to pick my husband, nor marry me to somebody who has nothing to recommend him except a bag of money. And I am sufficiently conceited to think a man might love me for my own person rather than what you may or may not see fit to leave me when you die, which will not be for fifty years judging by your appearance."

"I'm not dictating. I'm advising you. Now write Leonard that I shall be delighted to see him for the sake of old Omega."

"He writes me he has resigned his chair at Omega. He intends to go into business."

"Is that so? Well, a fat chance one of those long-faced lecturers will have in a world where you have to fight for what you get. However, he has more pluck than most of them. Maybe I'll try to find him a job. If he is up on chemistry I might get him four or five thousand a year somewhere. You spend twenty-five thousand a year, so don't let that get by you."

"Let's go into dinner," said Lucy.

CHAPTER III.

THE DAYLIGHT BANK ROBBERY.

PROFESSOR LEONARD arrived in New York, telephoned Miss Ransome, and received a cordial invitation to dine with her and her father at their home at seven in the evening.

He arrived at the appointed hour, found Miss Ransome grown more charming during the year past, and so beautiful in a gown of some sort of silver cloth with a narrow silver band about her pale gold hair that it completely unnerved him. He took her

hand, but he could only open his mouth and close it without saying a word.

Being entirely aware of her appearance, because she had at that moment left the full length mirror in her dressing room, she smiled kindly at the poor young man and made conversation to give him a chance to recover his faculties.

Leonard pleased her rather more than when she had last seen him. To his ordinary charm of manner, ease and assurance, which he quickly recovered under her conversational treatment, he had added something—a grimmer set of the square jaw or perhaps it was a more masterful look in the cold blue eyes. He could not be described as a gentle professor; he looked like a scholar with a punch.

For five or ten minutes they chatted about Omega and her visit the previous year; then Thomas Ransome came into the house with an agitated manner, fully a quarter of an hour late.

"Father," she said reproachfully. "Didn't you remember that we had a guest for dinner? You are late. And you surely recall Professor Leonard?"

"Oh, sure, sure," he replied rather absently as he offered his hand to the guest. "How are you, professor, and how are things at dear old Omega? Quite a long ways from home, aren't you?"

"New York will be my home in the future, sir. I have resigned my chair at Omega."

"Yeh. I think my daughter told me. Well, you'll find bucking real life different from telling young morons their A.B.C.'s. Do you mind, Lucy, if I don't dress for dinner? I'm rather upset about something."

"Please do not trouble on my account, Mr. Ransome," pleaded Leonard.

"Thanks, I won't. Let's go right in. I'm hungry as a bear because I had no lunch to-day."

Lucy laughed merrily. To the professor she said:

"Something terrible must have happened to make father miss his lunch."

"You said a mouthful," the old gentleman retorted. Then they seated themselves at the big dining-room table where only three places were laid.

"Mrs. Edwards who runs the house, and rather supervises me, went to visit her sister for a few days so we are a very small company," explained Miss Ransome.

"I appreciate your admitting me into your little family circle all the more."

Tom Ransome was eating his soup. When he finished his mood improved; he became a bit expansive.

"Most astonishing thing I ever heard of in my life," he said. "Boldest and most ingenious thing ever done."

"For pity sake's explain, dear. What on earth has happened?"

Ransome cleared his throat. "Confidential, professor. Must be kept secret, but here's what happened. The Mastodon Trust Company, biggest trust company in New York, was robbed to-day. I'm a director. We had a special meeting to investigate. Can't discover a thing."

"Really," commented the professor. "You amaze me. Was a large amount of money taken?"

"A hundred thousand dollars in one-thousand-dollar bills. That's a queer feature of the thing. The robbery must have occurred between twelve o'clock and one. The money came out of the big safe. There was a million or two in big bills in the safe. This package disappeared, why not the remainder? Any thief, who could get inside our safe in the middle of the day, might just as well have walked off with everything as contented himself with one hundred thousand dollars."

"Who did it, father?" Lucy demanded with sparkling eyes.

The old man laid down his knife and fork and regarded her with pity.

"How do you suppose I know?"

"Well don't they suspect anybody. Do you think it was one of the bank officials?"

"Not a chance. With our system no employee could possibly take any money out of the bank in the day time, and after hours the time lock on the safe makes it impossible."

"We've got a wonderful system at the Mastodon. Every person who passes through the entrance is spotted by our private detectives and watched until he has transacted his business and left. Every

employee has to account for all cash handled every day. Nobody gets money from the big safe without leaving vouchers with the clerk in charge. The clerk at the entrance to the safe room is heavily bonded and submits to search every time he leaves his post to go to lunch or to go home. To-day this particular packet came in at twelve o'clock. At one the clerk went to get it for one of the tellers and it was gone. He reported the loss immediately.

"As soon as the loss was discovered every employee on duty during that period was checked by our system and all passed the test successfully. That money vanished into thin air."

"Didn't the clerk in the safe room notice anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Well I'll tell you how it happened," declared Lucy excitedly. "Somebody slipped into the safe room when the clerk was not looking, watched his chance, and slipped out the same way."

"Rubbish!" scoffed her father. "The safe room is always locked. The clerk personally opens the grille for such employees as have business inside, locks it again, accompanies them, checks them and lets them out, locking the door after them."

"Is there any theory?" asked the professor carelessly.

"Well, we know that somebody in the bank is a crook, but the method is brand new. However, we have engaged Foster Gaines, the best private detective in the country, and of course we have the service of the Blinkertons. We'll land the thief all right, but it's darn exasperating to have a system like ours and then have some sharp rascal walk into our safe in broad daylight and shove a hundred thousand-dollar bills in his pocket. And it's got to be kept quiet or it would weaken confidence in the Mas-todon.

"I know you are a man of honor, professor, or I shouldn't discuss the matter with you. And Lucy is a featherhead, but she knows how to keep her mouth shut about business matters."

"I assure you I shall not mention the matter," promised the professor.

Having got his problem off his chest, Tom Ransome became genial and carried on a bantering conversation with his daughter. Her replies were so pointed and rapid that Leonard was delighted and would have formed a higher opinion of her intelligence than he had entertained before, if that were possible.

After dinner, the magnate smoked a cigar and turned his attention to the private affairs of his guest in a manner that would have been impertinent if it were not well-intentioned.

"Look here, Dr. Leonard, what's the idea of your chucking the college professor business?" he demanded.

"I found myself unable to live on my salary so I decided that the commercial world would buy my goods for a better price."

"You're dead right. Of course this book learning is overrated. You fellows get the idea that what you know is worth more than it really is. The most successful men I know are those who never went to college; they got their educations in brushing against other men and matching wits with them. Lots of college graduates come to work for me, and most of them don't know much of anything. In fact the fellows in my office who didn't go to college hold all the good jobs and the college men fill the subordinate positions."

Professor Leonard smiled indulgently, because he was familiar with the argument of the self-made man.

"One of the most common errors in this country is to assume that the possession of a college diploma indicates a cultured and educated man," he stated. "Our educational requirements in American colleges are much too low, our system of examinations is a very poor way of checking knowledge. A man who is content to spend four years at a university and get passable marks in various subjects is likely to emerge not much better educated than when he entered. You know the adage, 'Gild a farthing as you will, it is but a farthing still.'

"Parents persist in sending boys and girls to college who have no aptitude for learning and culture, who acquire what is

necessary to pass, like parrots, and forget what they have learned very easily. If a boy who has brains enters one of our colleges and applies himself to the work, if he is not content with the minimum of knowledge but wishes to learn as much as possible, if he is determined to take advantage of all the opportunities for knowledge which are open to him, the libraries, the laboratories, the facilities for culture, he will come out a really educated man."

"But what good does it do him if he gets it? That's what I want to know."

Dr. Leonard made a gesture with his two hands which expressed volumes. "It depends upon what you mean by good. Set a man with a brain like this against a man with equal mentality who has had no opportunity for higher education, and he will beat him, provided the college man considers the goal as important as the other fellow; usually he does not."

"If all that there is in life may be found in a big bag of money, very likely a thorough educational development is no good, as you intimate. But if a successful life is ability to enjoy good books, good music, fine pictures, beautiful scenery, travel, social contact, philosophical meditation, then the educated man will be far happier than the ignorant one."

"Well, I don't take any stock in those things. It's the game that appeals to me, the struggle, the victory of business. And as far as I can see the educated men don't get any chance to buy books, hear music, travel and all that sort of thing because they haven't got the jack. And the business man who spends his nights at the opera is liable to wake up some morning and find he isn't in business because some fellow who sat at home, doping out a way to trim him, gobbled up his fortune."

"I think Professor Leonard is absolutely right," declared Lucy. "You, father, are a barbarian."

"I should worry," retorted Tom Ransome. "I'm a doctor of laws. If you don't believe it, I'll show you my diploma. By and by I'm going to give Omega a stadium and then I'll be a doctor of philosophy, same as the professor here. There isn't anything in this world money can't buy."

"Yes," replied the professor. "A contented soul."

"Have you got one?"

"I did have until a year ago. I hope to regain it."

"But first you want to make money."

"Not for my own sake. For a certain purpose. When I get it, I want to go back to teaching."

"You won't go back. You're a smart young fellow."

"Thank you, Mr. Ransome."

"Now the thing for you to do is to get a job with some big chemical or electrical company, and maybe I can do something for you. Of course you won't get much to start, three or four thousand a year maybe, but you can work up to a pretty good thing."

"Why, that's very good of you, sir, but I have some plans which I trust will bring me in a much larger income. I am very anxious to secure a large income as soon as possible." He looked meaningfully at Lucy Ransome who dropped her eyes and colored slightly.

"Well, do what you like, but call on me if you change your mind. What is it, Wilson?"

Wilson was the butler who had entered with a card on a small silver saucer.

"Foster Gaines," read the contractor. "Our detective. Tell him to come right in."

A moment later, Foster Gaines, the celebrated detective, entered. They regarded him curiously. Ransome, himself, had never met the man who had solved several astonishingly difficult cases. They saw a small, slight person with a tiny black mustache and rimless nose glasses through which a pair of birdlike black eyes looked keenly.

He was in evening clothes and wore them with distinction. His manner was casual; apparently to invade the home of a millionaire in the evening was not an event in his life. When he spoke, it was in a low, well-placed and pleasant voice, and his diction was clear and precise. So different was he from the conventional detective, that none of the three present would have believed it to be his profession if they had not known his identity.

"Glad to see you, Gaines," Ransome greeted him. "This is my daughter and this is Professor Leonard of Omega College, friend of ours. You can talk before them because I've told them about the robbery. Anything to report?"

"Good evening, Miss Ransome, and Professor Leonard. You will pardon this intrusion, I trust. It happens that it was Mr. Ransome who engaged me for the bank and I wished to confer with him. Being only a criminal investigator and not a prestidigitator, I cannot produce the criminal at this instant.

"Do you happen to know anything about Chester Welles, your safe clerk?" he asked, turning to Mr. Ransome.

"Sure. I've known the fellow for three years. He's all right, isn't he?"

"Perfectly normal, sane person?"

"Until to-day I would have said so."

"I had a talk with him this afternoon. He told me something he had not thought to tell the directors. It seems that about twelve thirty he thought he heard a noise. He looked around and there seemed to be something the matter with his eyes, a bit as though somebody had flashed light into them.

"He rubbed them and they were all right. A few moments later he glanced toward the safe door and got the same effect. It was gone in a moment. He discovered that the package of thousand-dollar notes had vanished about ten minutes later."

"Well," said Ransome, "what of that? If the fellow has weak eyes he ought to wear glasses. I don't see any connection with the robbery."

"It seemed to me suspicious that he had this optical trouble about the time the bank was being robbed. Anything unusual is worthy of attention at a time like that."

"My dear man, the intruder had to be admitted by Welles, who locked the door after him, and opened it to let him go out, so I don't see what a blurred vision would have to do with the theft."

"May I ask what chair you occupy at Omega, professor?" demanded the detective.

"Chemistry and Physics."

"Indeed! Perhaps you can tell me if there is any known gas which might be used to obtain an effect like that?"

"There are gases which produce blindness, and unconsciousness, of course, but their results are more serious. I know of no gas which would have the effect you describe. On the other hand the war caused a tremendous interest in gas and it is possible that somebody has invented one which would do just that."

"How about the bank detectives, the bank officers, the tellers and cashiers, not to mention the locks on the various grille doors?" asked Ransome with profound sarcasm. "Some gas to put them all out of business while a hundred thousand dollars flew the coop."

"If you wanted ordinary detective work on this case you would not have engaged me," retorted the detective evenly. "This is an amazing case. Unseen hands abstracted that money, if it were not stolen by some sort of conspiracy among the employees. You have a good system, but there is always a way to beat a system."

"Precisely. Look for that way of beating our system and you will nab the thieves. Forget your gases and don't imagine that ghosts stole the money. Ghosts might do it but they don't need money."

"Human agency is responsible for the robbery," smiled Gaines. "But modern science approaches the supernatural. I am very much interested in Welles's experience."

"I think you are right to overlook no feature of the case," said Professor Leonard. "In our laboratories we often happen on great discoveries by investigating the most insignificant deviation from the expected."

"Rubbish!" observed the millionaire. "Come back when you've got something worth talking about, Gaines."

"Very good, Mr. Ransome," the detective replied with a smile. "May I ask professor, if you are going to be in town long?"

"I expect to locate here."

"This case presents strange aspects, and I am not too strong on blurs of light that steal money. Would it be an imposition if I should drop in on you in case I get

a line on something that calls for a knowledge beyond my own?"

"I should be very much interested to know how you are getting along, and at present I am residing at the Mammoth Hotel."

"Delighted to have met you, professor, and you, Miss Ransome. Good night, Mr. Ransome. I trust you will hear from me soon."

The little detective bowed himself out; then Leonard, glancing at his watch thought he had better depart himself, as he had spent considerable time for a first visit.

"May I telephone you within a day or so?" he asked Miss Ransome after he had said good night to her father.

"I shall be peeved if you don't."

Their eyes exchanged unspoken messages. Then the door closed behind him.

"Imagine that jackass of a detective thinking of consulting a college professor in connection with a bank robbery," scoffed Ransome, as soon as they were alone. "The fellow is no good. I'll give him a couple of weeks and then the gate."

In the meantime Professor Leonard proceeded to his hotel, got the key to his room, a modest one near the sky. Once locked in, he went to his suit case, opened it, took out a black box about eight inches long by six inches wide and patted it proudly. Then he reached beneath a pile of shirts and drew out a thick packet of bills which he proceeded to fondle. There were one hundred of them and they were all of one-thousand-dollar denomination.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VANISHING BANKNOTES.

"IT'S a curious thing," he muttered, "that I should have picked out her father's bank. But it isn't his money. He is only one of the directors."

There was a grim smile on Leonard's face as he secreted the loot of the Mastodon Trust Company, put his precious black box back into its place, and relocked his suitcase. He made his preparations for bed in a leisurely fashion. Presently he turned out the light and retired. But not for the

night. In half an hour he rose again, flashed on the light, began to dress, and his face wore a frown.

For the first time in his life he was worried by the problem of the safe deposit of his wealth. Thieves might break into the room. He took the bills from their hiding place, made them into a package wrapped in brown paper. They occupied a space about six inches by two and a half by one inch, and slipped into his coat pocket with ease. Descending to the hotel office he went to the desk and handed the little bundle to the clerk.

"Please put this in the safe for me."

"Certainly, Mr. Leonard."

Serene in his unconsciousness of the value of the small package, the clerk placed it in a compartment of the safe, locked it, gave the key to the professor and also a receipt. Finally assured that nothing could happen to the foundation of his fortune, Dr. Leonard returned to his room and slept sweetly and dreamlessly through the night.

In the morning he read about the bank robbery in the newspapers. Though the directors of the Mastodon had agreed to keep the robbery a secret, the bank employed three or four hundred people, nearly all of whom had learned of the big loss before the close of banking hours.

Despite the order that nothing should be said about it, some of them talked. One newspaper was visited by an assistant teller who earned fifty dollars a week and had a wife and sick baby. He sold the story to the city editor for two hundred dollars under an agreement that the newspaper should conceal the source of its information, a pledge that newspapers always keep.

How the yellows did rejoice over that story! One of the most imposing of New York banks, a bank which boasted that it was burglar proof, which had a safe with such complicated locks that the finest cracksmen in the world might work a month without penetrating into its interior, was looted in the middle of the working day, a dozen detectives within call, with all the officers on duty, by thieves who had not left a trace of their presence; thieves whose ability to pass through half a dozen locked bronze grilles was evidently superhuman.

One paper took satisfaction in pointing out that no bank was safe from the latest master cracksman, and boldly speculated as to which would be visited next.

None had a theory of the slightest value to offer regarding the method of operation; the effect of the morning news was to terrorize every bank in the city. However, there was one paragraph in one of the newspapers which disturbed the equanimity of the master bank thief, himself. It was as follows:

The thief will have difficulty in changing his collection of thousand-dollar bills. Very few bills as large as these are in circulation. No stranger offering a thousand-dollar bill for deposit in a bank, or for change in a hotel or restaurant, will go unscrutinized. While the bills were not marked so far as can be ascertained, anybody presenting one during the next few weeks or months will probably be asked to prove where he got it, and it is possible that the thief, clever as he is, will be caught when he attempts to spend his ill-gotten gains.

Professor Leonard read this paragraph with considerable uneasiness. As thousand-dollar bills are legal tender it had not occurred to him up to that time that he could be traced if he offered them in payment for goods or for deposit in a bank. He had expected to take five of them that very morning and open an account somewhere. Now he realized that there is a lot to the business of thievery besides thieving.

At the very beginning of his career he might have made a fatal blunder. He offered thanks to the anonymous reporter who had saved him. Still, a fortune one does not dare to spend is no fortune. After paying his bills in Omega and leaving the place forever, he had only a couple of hundred dollars left. Less embarrassing currency than the loot of the Mastodon was necessary.

With his little black box he sallied forth shortly after ten o'clock, and again found his way to the financial district.

About an hour later, the paying teller of the Vivemont Trust Company, who had left his cage, for a moment, to consult the cashier in response to a summons, returned and gave vent to a cry of astonishment and dismay.

Half a dozen packages each containing ten one-hundred-dollar bills, which had lain on his desk just inside the window had disappeared. Only six feet away, leaning against the writing shelf upon which customers made out their deposit slips, stood a six-foot, uniformed bank policeman, who was looking directly at the distracted young man.

"Bill, quick!" he exclaimed. "Who has been at this window since I went out?"

Bill lumbered over to the little window.

"What de ye mane?" he demanded.

"Who has been at this window? Quick, he may have got away!"

"Not a soul," declared the officer.

"There must have been. Somebody reached his arm through and grabbed five or six thousand dollars."

"Not through this window, me boy. I saw you go out and I stationed meself here on purpose. Sure, I read about the robbery at the Mastodon Trust, and I'm on the job here every minute."

"The money is gone," said the teller in cold despair. "It didn't go out through the door with me, and I locked the door after me. Therefore it must have gone through the window."

"As God is me judge, nobody came to this window!" affirmed the officer.

"That's right, Frank," said the paying teller in the next cage. "There was nobody at my window, and I could see into your cage. You had no customers while you were out, and you were not gone two minutes."

"Then perhaps you will explain what has become of this money? There were six packs of hundred-dollar bills lying right here, well out of reach, unless somebody stuck in his arm up to the elbow, and of course, you or Bill would have seen that."

"You bet we would," agreed the officer.

"Well, I've got to go to the president. I'd rather commit suicide," said the poor youth, who knew himself responsible for all cash in his cage, and who saw himself paying off the loss until he was old and gray.

He told his story to the president in a halting, shamefaced manner which carried no conviction, and was told by that granite-

visaged official to go back to work while an investigation was made.

Undoubtedly it would have gone hard with him had not the Clapstone National Bank reported exactly the same experience late in the afternoon. During the absence of a teller from his cage, about three thousand dollars in twenty-fifty, and hundred-dollar bills, which were piled up inside the window at the right, apparently well out of reach of a pilferer, vanished in exactly the same way.

And then the panic among bank employees started. Of course, the cases of the Vivemont and Clapstone had many points of similarity to that of the Mastodon. In every case the money vanished during working hours. In each instance there were plenty of officials to swear that no stranger had been in a position to remove it. Both paying tellers were young men of good character, heavily bonded, and of obvious integrity. It was so completely mystifying as to be terrifying.

CHAPTER V.

CRAVEN HAS SUSPICIONS.

AMONG those who read of the astounding series of daylight bank robberies with unusual interest was John Craven, graduate of Omega, now back home in New York with his nice new diploma, and an overweening ambition to get along in the world without too much labor and without any particular regard for methods.

He read of the Mastodon affair with his tongue hanging out from envy. To think of a man acquiring a hundred thousand dollars in one fell swoop. With a hundred thousand a fellow could live comfortably for the rest of his life without working.

Out of every hundred young men who leave college, not more than two or three are inspired with an ambition to go into business, start in humbly at the bottom and by dint of close attention to duty, punctuality, willingness to remain overtime in the office, and unremitting hard work, rise gradually until they own the place about the time they are fifty.

To twenty years, fifty is senility. That a man of fifty could get any enjoyment out of life seems utterly impossible; when they see such a man laughing gayly in a café or tripping the light fantastic on a dance floor they sneer, for they know it is a sad effort to hide a life weariness under a mask of hilarity.

"What good is money to a man of fifty?" asks impatient youth. "The time to be rich is now, when one is able to enjoy riches."

It is the short cut to fortune that appeals to the college graduate, which explains why magnates like Tom Ransome have to kick many of them out of his office for inattention to duty. However, all short cuts are closed, and after a time the college man discovers that if he doesn't work he won't eat, which causes him to buckle down to business and become a productive member of society.

John Craven differed from most bachelors of arts in that he had absorbed very little of the ethics that the schools endeavor to inculcate along with knowledge. As nothing interested him in college except science, he had not scrupled to make use of illegal methods of passing examinations in other subjects. A series of peculations which had disturbed the faculty during the past two or three years ceased after his graduation. Omega's most prominent bootlegger feared his business would be ruined when Craven graduated. A certain New York fence who had been purchasing valuable books and scientific instruments for a song, and selling them at a big profit, shook his head sadly when this enterprising student dropped in on him one day with a few samples and explained at length that he would return no more with that sort of product.

Much as the unprincipled conduct of Dr. Leonard may be regretted, he had justified his behavior to his own conscience; he had convinced himself that society had been cheating him in what it paid for his brains in the past, and that he was only getting back his own. Craven was nothing but a rogue, a mean, prying, petty thief, but he happened to have unusual intelligence. The Leonards may reform; that the Cravens will

ever develop a conscience is highly improbable.

When Craven read of the robbery of both the Clapstone and the Vivemont Banks, he did not need the deductions of the reporters to suppose that they were the work of the same person or persons. It was obvious to him. Considerably excited, he drew paper and pencil from the drawer of his desk and began to make curious lines and marked them with meaningless symbols. For an hour he worked feverishly, then he threw down the pencil with an exclamation of disgust. He had struck a blank wall.

Nevertheless, Craven was the only person in the world who could have told at that moment the identity of the master bank thief, and, though it was his duty to society to impart the information to the police, wild horses could not have persuaded him to do so. John Craven knew that it was Dr. Frank Leonard who was robbing banks with impunity; also he had a fair notion of the method.

In his opinion Leonard had found out how to make himself invisible. Preposterous as the theory appeared, he had evidence tending to demonstrate it. With Leonard he had been conducting experiments in refraction in the college laboratory. Following those experiments to their conclusion seemed to Craven as likely to bring startling results. All of a sudden the professor had dropped that line of investigation and turned off at a tangent. To Craven's suggestions that they go on, he had been evasive, explained that they would lead nowhere—that they might just as well take up the fourth dimension, or transmutation of metals, or astrology.

Without having enough genius or special knowledge, he had tried to continue along the original line by himself. What he would find he did not know, but that there was something sensational in sight he was sure.

Then Professor Leonard terminated his college career. Why? And the Omega policeman had seen the professor do something that alarmed him; it had something to do with the eyes. Leonard was in New York. Banks were being entered and robbed in full view of all their employees.

No ordinary thief with ordinary methods could possibly accomplish such things. But an invisible man might enter and leave the most strictly guarded institution at will.

Craven did not blame the professor for refusing to share his secret with him. Since he intended to use it illegally, he would do well to avoid confederates. But with what he knew and suspected, Craven might force his former teacher to let him in. John Craven would have loved to be able to make himself invisible at will. The moderation with which the professor helped himself to riches struck him as highly absurd. If he once got into the strong room of a bank, you can bet he would not come out until he had taken all he could carry.

The first thing to do would be to locate the professor, and the best way would be to write to Omega for the address to which his mail was being forwarded. He tore up his futile experimental scribbling, and dropped a line to the dean of the college stating that he wished to send the professor some books. He was reasonably certain of receiving the address in a few days.

It was too bad he could not be with the professor to guide him in his marauding. A man as honest and open as Leonard might make some fatal error, which his own experience in sneaking in and out of second story windows, and filching pocketbooks, would avoid.

Craven grew wildly excited at the prospects of the coming partnership. Invisibility promised so much in so many lines. Why stop at money which is bulky? Why not rare gems? The big jewelry establishments would be as helpless as the banks. If Leonard would not know how to dispose of the jewels, Craven could manage that end of the business. Really, it would be a very equitable alliance.

Professor Leonard would have been the first to mourn that his own bad example was having such an effect upon his former pupil. He had not yet realized that no one among us can take the slightest action without its affecting others, and sometimes the result of an ill-considered step by a person of no importance in one country will cause misery and misfortune all around the world.

Here was Craven entirely divorced from

an honest career just because he suspected an opportunity to join hands with a master thief. And other dire results were to follow.

CHAPTER VI.

LEONARD ATTENDS A CONFERENCE.

IN the meantime Professor Frank Leonard was sitting pretty. His package of thousand-dollar bills still reposed in the hotel safe, but he was in possession of some eight thousand dollars in small notes, and he had no reluctance in opening a drawing account at a neighboring bank with an initial deposit of five thousand dollars. The money he had pilfered from the Clapstone and Vivemont banks was unmarked and had been placed upon the tellers' counters to be ready for cashing checks presented at their windows. To track them would be impossible.

He realized that he must not become wealthy too suddenly. It would have been very difficult for him to explain the possession of a large amount of money, as his financial situation had been well known at Omega.

Since he was only a small town young man with a special scientific knowledge, but little general information, he did not exactly know how one went about increasing his capital in an apparently legitimate manner, nor was there anybody whom he could consult in the matter. This was sure, however: he did not propose to steal any more money. The unusual advantage his discovery had given him over other people he now desired to use in a different manner, a more legitimate though perhaps still unethical manner.

Like every other business man, he had needed capital, and he had considered his enforced contributions from the banks as loans which he would later repay with interest. At the risk of causing honest readers to lose interest in our hero, we must admit that he was fundamentally sound. He had reasoned that he could use his peculiar power to amass a large fortune which he needed to support Lucy Ransome after she consented to marry him. Since he had a sure thing, the banks should be willing to

loan him money at legal interest. But, because he could not explain his invention, and because he had no security to offer, he had obtained the loans irregularly. His reasoning would have disgusted John Craven, a true Robin Hood in embryo, but it saved his conscience.

In the great offices of Pontman & Moore, the biggest brokers in Wall Street, international financial rulers, controllers of a dozen great railways, operators of fifty public service corporations, managers of the billion-dollar loans to England, France, and Italy, two hundred clerks were busy at their work.

When you stepped out of the elevator in the great Pontman Building at the fifteenth floor you were in the outer office. At a little desk directly in front of you sat a bulky private policeman. Just at the right was an inquiry clerk, a bright young woman. A mahogany railing separated them and you from the multitude of workers in this hive of industry.

At small desks sat important-looking young men who had once rowed stroke oars or captained great football and baseball teams for famous colleges, learning to be captains of industry by beginning at the bottom.

Most of them drew no salaries; it was a privilege to be employed in such a place. Away over at the right were fully forty girl stenographers who typed speedily, and often chewed gum with equal rapidity, but little noise came from that battery of writing machines; noiseless typewriters were obligatory in the office of Pontman & Moore.

Beyond rose the shining mahogany fronts of the private offices within which sat in state the commissioned officers of the great organization, the smart young lieutenants and adjutants of industry, the generals of the next decade, important young men between thirty and forty, some of whom were presidents of small corporations controlled by the great firm.

In more elaborate offices beyond these were the ten or twelve members of the firm, men who drew a guarantee and a tiny share in the profits of the enterprise. Among these was a former Secretary of the Treas-

ury and a man who had been mentioned for President of the United States.

And in a suite which occupied the far corner of the building, which got the sunlight nearly all day, were the superb quarters of the two giants who controlled this mighty enterprise, as well as two or three luxurious directors' rooms.

Explorers have averred that it is much easier to reach the Grand Lama of Tibet, the Pope of Rome, or the King of England than to penetrate uninvited into the presence of these two American citizens, one of whom was a barefoot boy on a Vermont farm and the other sold papers on the streets of New York half a century ago. If by any chance you got in, you had much less hope of escaping with your goods and chattels from Pontman & Moore than from any of the other potentates mentioned.

Now it happened that Pontman & Moore liked the looks of a railroad in the West named the L. Q. and R. It was a very good railroad which had been put on its feet and into the steady dividend paying class by a clever Chicago operator named Henry H. Higgins.

Higgins controlled this railroad. He actually owned about eighteen per cent of the voting stock, but he used this and enough proxies to outvote all other elements which turned up at his annual meeting. The rest of the stock was spread all over the country, mostly in the hands of small investors who admired their seven per cent dividends, and Higgins for giving them such a good profit.

It was such a good railroad that Pontman & Moore thought they would like it for themselves, but instead of going to Higgins and offering him a price for it, they began to sell the stock instead of buying it. The fact that they didn't own any stock didn't worry them at all, because they knew that these small investors would get scared pretty soon when they saw the price dropping and begin to throw their holdings on the market.

Mr. Higgins, out in Chicago, observed the large blocks of his stock that were being tossed on the market by brokers both in Chicago and New York, and, feeling pretty certain that the sellers didn't own the stock

they were offering, he ordered his brokers to buy everything offered and maintain the market price. At first he did not realize that it was the firm of Pontman & Moore who were after him, and when he did find out it was too late,

He was a splendid railroad operator and a pretty good stock operator, but alongside the colossus in New York he was a pygmy. Newspapers all over the country began to predict that L. Q. and R. would pass its dividend, that Higgins was an extravagant manager, that competing lines were getting business away from the road under fire. Pontman & Moore had facilities for getting stuff into the papers away beyond what Higgins possessed.

For a couple of weeks he fought a losing fight; the price gradually sank beneath the heavy selling.

If Pontman & Moore were selling stock they did not own, Higgins was buying stock he couldn't pay for, and the finish came when about five or ten thousand stockholders lost their nerve and began to dump their small holdings at any price they could get. If these stockholders had held firmly, Higgins would have been able to make the New York operators pay high for the stock they couldn't deliver to him. As it was, they were able to buy in much of the vast amount of stock they had sold him at a price some fifty points below that for which they sold it, and then they invited him East for a conference.

The papers were full of this expected conference. Upon it hinged a big movement, up or down, of L. Q. and R. Among the readers of the newspapers was Professor Leonard, who naturally concluded that a person who contrived to be present at that conference would make a killing in the stock market.

Higgins put up at a big New York hotel, gave out an interview in which he professed sublime confidence, and declared that he would meet Pontman & Moore at their office at ten thirty next day and dictate terms of peace.

The papers carried his photograph, so that Professor Leonard knew what he looked like. He was accompanied to the Pontman Building by half a dozen financial reporters

so that Frank Leonard could not fail to recognize him as he entered the building.

A member of the office staff met him at the elevators and led him along a passage to a private elevator leading directly to the private offices. Professor Leonard was the only person able to accompany him. Even then he almost lost out, because the operator attempted to close the elevator door on the heels of the Western magnate. But there was some obstruction—he could not close the door for a second, which enabled the professor to follow his boot into the car.

• They shot upward to the fifteenth floor and the door swung open. Leonard was out first, stood at one side and followed Higgins so closely as to be in lockstep. Both Pontman and Moore were on hand, a stenographer was present, no one else, when they entered the office of the senior partner.

Pontman held out his hand, but Higgins pretended not to see it.

"Well, I'm here," said the Westerner gruffly. "If I'd known who I was up against I would have avoided this fight. Now what is the decision?"

"Sit down, Mr. Higgins—sit down," said Pontman suavely, waving his hand to a vacant chair across the big table in the center of the room.

He was a thin, wiry, gray little man with a wisp of a white mustache and tired eyes. Moore was fat and pouchy under the eyes. He looked as though he would pop off with apoplexy inside of a year.

Leonard took the invitation to apply to himself, so he slipped into a vacant chair near the window from which he could see and hear everything.

"I am very sorry to have been compelled to bring you East," Mr. Pontman observed.

"Not as sorry as I was to come."

"It is a pleasure to meet a man who has done such fine work in the West."

"Cut out the preliminaries and get to business," said the railroad man curtly.

"Very well," smiled Mr. Pontman. "I have here some twenty-two thousand shares of L. Q. and R. which you purchased through your brokers at an average price

of seventy-two. No doubt you are prepared to pay for them."

"You know damn well I'm not."

"That's too bad. What are we going to do about it?"

"You mean, what are you going to do about it?"

"We want our money, naturally."

"How are you going to get it?"

"Well," said Mr. Pontman, "the price of the shares is thirty-two this morning."

"Driven down by your manipulation. Imagine a seven per cent stock selling at thirty-two!"

"We need not go into that."

"I shall accept your holdings of some thirty thousand shares at forty, which is eight points above the market, and the balance in cash. It amounts to about three hundred and eighty-four thousand dollars, I believe."

"I haven't any cash," said Higgins sullenly. "I have borrowed half a million on the stock."

"You are reputed to be worth six or eight million dollars."

"I never was worth half of that. I can't realize any more on my real estate, and I sacrificed all other securities to save L. Q. and R."

"In other words, you are bankrupt."

"I have three or four hundred thousand coming to me during the next three months on loans, but at present I am flat."

"My! My!" interjected Mr. Pontman sympathetically. "That's too bad. I am afraid I can't offer any better terms."

"You went after my scalp and got it. You have control of the railroad, for of course I'll turn over to you my stock. What more do you want?"

"Only our just due."

"Well, I'll assign to-day," said the railroad man. Most of his bluff assurance had vanished in the presence of these super-operators. "After thirty years of hard, honest work and achievement, my reward is bankruptcy. But I warn you not to ruin that road. My heart's blood is in it. It's the finest little railroad in the United States."

"No one regrets your personal loss more than we do," soothed Mr. Pontman. "Cer-

tainly the future of the L. Q. and R. will be our most tender care. We shall go on where you—ahem—unfortunately failed. And please see that your stock is turned over immediately. For the balance we must take our chances with your other creditors."

"You forget that my stock is mortgaged."

"We shall take care of the mortgages. Arrange to give us full authority. We are letting you off easily, Mr. Higgins."

"Simply because you can't get blood out of a stone. Your high-handed methods will react on you yet. And I propose to live to see it."

"Good luck to you, Mr. Higgins. And good morning."

Higgins got up and walked unsteadily to the exit. Leonard rose hastily and followed him out. He did not wish to take chances of being prevented from escaping. If he could not be seen, he was as tangible as any other mortal.

Once in the elevator Higgins began a string of oaths which were not finished until they reached the ground floor. Outside a group of reporters surrounded him.

"I'm through. I assign to-day," he told the reporters. "They have control of the road and they promised to take good care of it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROFESSOR PLAYS THE MARKET.

A FEW minutes later the cigar clerk in the corridor of the Pontman Building was surprised to see a man emerge from a telephone booth which he would have sworn was empty, but he assumed that his attention had been distracted at the moment of entrance. Professor Leonard, little black box under his arm, had come out of the booth and gone straight to a big brokerage concern across the street.

"Will you take a check from me for a purchase of stock on a ten point margin?" he asked the cashier.

"Only if you are well known. Otherwise cash. Most customers prefer to pay cash."

"But this might total a large amount."

"Then bring in large bills," said the man with a smile.

Without being aware of it, Leonard had entered a prominent bucket shop where business men speculated under assumed names, and cash was the ordinary procedure.

He hurried uptown, jubilant. Here was a place where his thousand-dollar bills would not be questioned, and he had a tip on the market which could not fail to be profitable. How many operators would have given their ears to be present at the conference between Pontman and Moore and Higgins! He knew that they had acquired the railroad and had promised to foster and nourish it. The stock had dropped from ninety to thirty-two. In a few days it would shoot upward to its old price, now that the battle was over and the stronger of the contestants had won. On a ten point margin he would make an enormous profit.

He drew his precious package from the care of the hotel clerk, abstracted twenty thousand-dollar bills, drew five thousand in five hundreds and hundreds from his bank, and took the subway back to Wall Street.

"Buy me twenty-five hundred shares of L. Q. and R. on ten point margin," he instructed the broker, drawing his roll from his pocket as he spoke. The cashier's eyes stuck out as he saw the cash for such a large order, and he pressed the buzzer which summoned the senior partner. In the meantime he ran his eye over the money and saw that it was good.

Jim Rankin, of Rankin & Krause, sharp and shrewd and pitiless, was exceedingly genial to one who might prove a very profitable customer, and particularly one who wanted to wager on a stock which had been so active. Looking Leonard over carefully, he decided that the man was an ordinary sucker, not in the least likely to have a straight tip, which was what he really wanted to know.

The difference between a bucket shop and a legitimate broker, as many people may not know, is that the broker purchases securities ordered by customers, or sells them, upon the stock exchange, while the bucketeer accepts the orders, does not put them through, but gambles against the customer.

Sometimes regular brokers adopt such practices in cases where they are sure the customer is wrong, but if discovered they will be expelled from the stock exchange. When there is a strong bull market and everybody is buying, the bucketeer often goes to the wall, but usually it is the patron who is ruined.

Leonard could not have come to a better place to dispose of his stolen thousand-dollar bills. They dropped into a safe in company with many others of the same denomination. Had Rankin positively known that his new customer was the man who robbed the Mastodon of a hundred thousand dollars, he would have held his peace, because he would expect that in the course of a few weeks the entire amount would find its way into his own bank account.

In the meantime he gave Leonard a receipt for his money and a moment later gave him a slip certifying that twenty-five hundred shares of L. Q. and R. had been purchased at the market. If he had actually bought them, the market would have moved up a couple of points; as it was, it remained at thirty-two.

Of course the ticker carried the news, such as it was, of the interview between Higgins and Pontman. An hour later it carried a bulletin to the effect that Henry H. Higgins had gone back to his hotel and put a bullet through his head. The stock dropped a point and a half on this information, then went back to thirty-two.

On the following day it crept up to thirty-three and a half. This meant a fifteen per cent profit for Professor Leonard on his twenty-five thousand dollars investment, fifty per cent more than Omega had paid him per year for the best lectures on chemistry and physics in any small college in the country.

The professor was treading on air. He called Lucy Ransome and made an engagement to take her to the theater the following evening. Then he took ten more of his big bills and purchased another thousand shares of L. Q. and R. through a broker who happened to be a legitimate one. As in the first case, his cash was taken without question.

The following morning came chaos.

Pontman and Moore issued a statement from their representative in the field to the effect that the L. Q. and R. was in dire need of new equipment, that its earnings did not justify a seven per cent dividend, that its surplus was inadequate, long stretches of the roadbed in need of replacement, and that a bond issue of ten million dollars, equal to the entire common stock of the company and to take precedence over it, would be necessary to put the road in proper shape.

None of the insiders took any stock in this report, but it indicated to them that Pontman and Moore were bearing the stock, which was enough. The public of course accepted it, and threw what shares it held on the market. Furthermore the banks which held the Higgins stock as security for his notes, tossed that also on the market, and Pontman and Moore were able to secure it at very much less than it would have cost them to pay off the notes as they had assured Higgins they would do. It was high finance at its zenith.

The stock dropped to twenty by two o'clock, and Professor Leonard lost his entire investment. The brokers had telephoned his hotel for more margins and found him not at home. The legitimate broker had tried to sell out in time to save him a trifle of his investment, but the stock went down too fast. Rankin simply made twenty-five thousand dollars.

When the professor learned his fate he was stupefied for a time; then a wild anger against the Judas, Pontman, poured into his soul. That this pleasant old gentleman whose deportment had filled him with confidence during the conference with the furious Westerner at which he had been an unseen spectator, and whose intentions toward the railroad he had just acquired were so benevolent, should have acted in such a manner was inexplicable. Why should he be responsible for a raid on his own company when it was so obviously to his interests to cause his property to increase in value?

Anybody who had Leonard's opportunity to be on the inside would have done exactly as he had done. He did not yet realize that a man may hear and not understand.

One ignorant of the principles of physics might hear a lecture by Professor Leonard without being unable to follow it. So, a man as uninformed as himself regarding the habit of mind of stock operators and their methods of doing business, might be excused for drawing wrong deductions.

In truth, a number of bright young men in Pontman and Moore's offices who were aware of the surrender of Higgins were caught on the wrong side of L. Q. and R. through the astute stroke by the master-minds of finance. Which did not help professor Leonard in his bewilderment.

No man is so indignant at the discovery of dishonesty in others as one who is dishonest himself; and Professor Leonard, who had ultimate honorable intentions, was no exception. Many a former clerk in a bank is wearing unbecoming stripes and picking oakum because he borrowed other people's money to follow a straight tip on the market.

It happened that the professor had been an undergraduate when his university had presented Pontman with an LL.D for notable achievements in the business world and he had listened with interest to a discourse by the great promoter on rectitude in commerce. To find that Pontman and Moore were capable of deliberately, and maliciously wrecking a railroad, as well as being entirely responsible for the suicide of the builder of that road, Henry H. Higgins, was a profound shock to Frank Leonard. It grieved him that the code of business ethics were so low.

Also it placed him in a most unpleasant position. He had lost thirty thousand of the hundred and ten odd thousands he had purloined from three banks, which precluded his replacing that money in the immediate future, and it seemed to close to him the door of rapid and legitimate gains, since what profited him his ability to enter anywhere unseen if what he heard in the councils of the mighty, would cause him to play the market on the wrong side.

Evidently the policy of the great men of Wall Street was to prevent their left hand from knowing what their right hand intended to do. Either that or Leonard needed to take an interpreter with him

when he paid them visits; certainly his own judgment could not be depended upon.

His condition, of course, was far from desperate. A man with nearly eighty thousand dollars in reserve is not ruined, but his discouragement was great because he seemed to have been restricted, through the untrustworthiness of the powers of Wall Street, to a career of direct burglary, if he wished to get the million dollars he had set as his goal.

CHAPTER VIII.

TEACHER AND PUPIL.

WHILE Dr. Leonard sat in his room in an atmosphere of indigo, the name of John Craven was telephoned as being below and anxious for an interview. Professor Leonard did not wish to see the former pupil, but he could not be rude; therefore he told the clerk to have him ascend.

Craven entered with a confidence that was not assumed. He felt very sure that he held the whip hand in the interview which was about to take place. While he held out a velvet gloved hand, the iron was beneath it; by hook or crook, by fair means or foul, by persuasion or threats, he intended to make Leonard let him on upon the most wonderful get-rich-quick scheme of the Christian era.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Mr. Craven," said the professor. "How did you find my address?"

"I wrote to Omega for it; certain things have transpired which made it necessary for us to get down to cases."

"I beg your pardon."

"To have a complete understanding."

"I don't like your tone, Mr. Craven," said Leonard in his best professional manner. However the ex-student did not quail. He smiled rather crookedly and retorted:

"You and I conducted some experiments at Omega. At the crucial point you excluded me and continued them alone. You supposed I did not know what you saw ahead, but I am no fool. I continued on my own account until I found out what you had discovered."

"Indeed!" said the professor icily. "And pray what did I discover?"

"You found a means of bending light rays to pass around a solid body, making it invisible."

Leonard started rather violently. Although Craven had not described his invention accurately he was much too close.

"You flatter me," he said with a shrug of his shoulders and a quick recovery of his composure. However Craven saw with delight that his shot had told.

"Not at all, I congratulate you. With this discovery of yours you can go where you like without being seen. You can walk out of this hotel without paying your bill. You could even enter banks and fill your pockets with their funds."

"I am sorry, Craven, to see you in this condition," said Professor Leonard sympathetically. "You have studied too hard. You need rest and change."

"Don't hand me that sort of talk. You robbed the Mastodon Trust company of one hundred thousand dollars. You also picked up some small change at the Vivemont and the Clapstone banks."

Professor Leonard rose with dignity, though he was almost petrified with terror. "I'll give you a chance to expound your interesting theory to the police," he said. "In the meantime I shall call the house detective and have you ejected from my room."

Craven lost his composure; after all he was a youthful criminal.

"Aw, don't take it that way," he exclaimed. "Of course I'm not going to give you away, professor. Can you imagine me telling a cop you could make yourself invisible? All I want is to get in on the graft. After all, you owe it to me to let me in. I worked on this discovery with you and I'm entitled to something."

Leonard sat down again, a little less perturbed, though he had no intention whatever of sharing his secret with this unprincipled young man.

"Perhaps you will explain to me the curious theory you have built up of an impossible discovery. I'll overlook your criminal charges on the ground of your condition."

"You've found out how to deflect light

rays so that they do not illuminate you and show you to other eyes."

"And how do you suppose this derangement of the laws of nature is accomplished?"

"Well," said Craven with a short laugh, "if I knew I would be working the opposite side of the street from you. I suppose you have your apparatus in compact form, carry it with you and turn it on and off at will."

"Again you flatter me."

"Oh, say, professor, come through!"

"Mr. Craven, I can only advise you to take your story to the police."

"Damn the police! I want to work the game. Say, professor, you don't realize half the opportunities this thing gives you. There is nothing we can't do. We'll stand this old world right up on its end with this trick and we'll be so rich that Henry Ford will be a piker alongside of us."

"I'll have to ask you to excuse me," said Professor Leonard, severely. "My time is valuable and you appear to do nothing but give vent to senseless ravings."

"Is that so?" retorted the angry recruit to crime. "Well I'll make you let me in. I want a half interest in this scheme and I'm going to have it."

Leonard went to the telephone and asked for the house detective. It was enough for Craven, who opened the door into the hall.

"I gave you your chance," he announced. "I wanted to treat you squarely. Now look out for yourself."

"Get out!" said Dr. Leonard testily. The door slammed, the visitor was gone and the professor had something else unpleasant to consider.

What a fool he had been! What a crack-brained, wild, mad fool! After an exemplary life, he had been insane enough to embark upon an adventure which put him in the position of an ordinary criminal. While he had assured himself that no human being would dream of such a miracle as his invention, nor was there any possibility of his ever being connected with the bank thefts, here was a man who had guessed everything, not only the discovery but the unworthy use to which he had put it.

So bitter had he been, so discontented,

so self engrossed in his cloud of injustice, that he had grasped at his discovery as a weapon to use against society, at least until it had paid him in full. So eager had he been for quick wealth to lay at the feet of the girl he loved that he had overlooked the possibilities of his discovery in a legitimate way, manners of using it which might, in time, have brought him great rewards. And now it looked as though he were at the mercy of an unscrupulous youth who wanted to share his secret for a wholesale raid on the wealth of the country.

Well, sooner than let his discovery fall into such hands he would destroy it, make restitution, abandon his pretensions to the hand of Lucy Ransome, go to prison. For the first time he realized what a weapon it would be for an arch criminal, a murderer who could approach any living person, strike him down and escape unseen. Armed with it a few score of men could destroy an army, a single airplane vanquish a fleet of enemy planes and battleships; the greatest weapon for warfare since the invention of gunpowder and he had degraded it to snatching a few handfuls of banknotes.

Having locked up the little black box in his big trunk, he dressed carefully for his dinner engagement with Lucy Ransome whom he was afterwards taking to the theater. This engagement he had made when his hopes were high; when he had felt certain that in a few days at the most he would be wealthy; then he would arrange for the return of the stolen bank funds, propose, satisfy Ransome of his financial worth, and, perhaps, live happily ever after.

What right did he have now to take this sweet innocent girl into a public place with a man who would be pilloried as a thief? As soon as Craven had given up hope of sharing the secret, he would undoubtedly be malicious enough to lay information before the authorities.

A decade or two ago a man who announced that another man could make himself invisible would be locked up by the police as a dangerous lunatic.

To-day, such is the credulity of the public mind, even the police mind, due to a succession of marvels which have become commonplaces, that there is no violation of

nature's rules, if announced with sufficient scientific rigmarole, which will not obtain credence.

So probably Craven could convince the authorities that a professor of physics might have found a way to keep people from seeing him when he wished, in which case they would quickly accept the theory that he was the invisible man who robbed the three banks. There probably never was a person who has not, at some time or other, wished he could enter a bank invisibly and help himself to the contents.

He felt reasonably certain that Craven could never arrive at his secret by himself; his scientific knowledge was much too elementary, nor would he go to the police immediately; but he was a menace, a very serious one.

In a mood which was very somber he presented himself at the Ransome home to be rallied by the radiant Lucy upon his evident gloom. Her effect upon him was so great and her good spirits so contagious that in fifteen minutes they were laughing and talking merrily, and the professor had succeeded in escaping from beneath his bundle of woes.

After all, Lucy Ransome liked him, he had a great secret, and he would utilize it to pull himself out of his hole, despite Craven and the perfidious Pontman and Moore, and any other obstacles.

They had dinner in a quiet, expensive East Side French restaurant where the atmosphere was cheerful, the food as well cooked and as daintily served as if the place were located a stone's throw from the Paris Opera. Afterwards they saw the Follies and had a wonderful time. The professor completely forgot everything until Will Rogers with his rope emerged and, after making several other observations, said:

"All I know is what I see in the papers. I see that they can't keep money in these New York banks. Yes, sir, as soon as they lay a package of bills down in a bank it just vanishes into thin air. I don't have to put money in a bank to have that happen. Just as soon as I get it, my money goes. But somebody must have taken that coin, and I lay a bet that the fellow who got away with it used most of it to buy a

couple of tickets for this show from a speculator. I bet he's sitting right down in the front of the house to-night."

Iron self control alone prevented Professor Leonard from leaping to his feet and running out of the theater. But the remark provoked a hurricane of laughter. Lucy whispered:

"Aren't people funny? He always accuses the audience of every crime that happens in New York and instead of feeling insulted it amuses them."

"Well," observed Leonard with a wry grin. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he is right."

"Nonsense!" laughed the girl. "Although, when thieves are not working at their trade, I presume they like to go to the theater and enjoy life."

"It is for such things that they steal," replied the professor with more earnestness than was necessary. The performance continued, and the presence by his side of the girl he desired more than anything in the world had the effect of an anæsthetic upon the man's nerves and conscience.

It was not until the final curtain fell that he landed back on earth.

All his difficulties returned in a parade headed by a brass band. Now he wanted to get the girl quickly home, to rid her of his soon-to-be-disgraced presence. What right had a criminal like himself to display himself in public with a creature so pure and fair and holy? Lucy, however, had no desire to go home; a dancing place where a famous jazz band played and where the proprietor shut up shop only after the last customer had dragged himself, or been dragged away, was the proper finale for a night like this.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROBBER ROBBED.

SO they went to the Beau Monde Club, where, to induce the patrons to buy liquor in defiance of the law, they charged as much for a bottle of mineral water as for a pair of highballs, and tucked on a three-dollar cover charge for good measure.

It was a fairly small room, not more than two hundred people could crowd in, and, when full, the dancing place was restricted to a tiny area which could not accommodate half the dancers although they tried very hard to make it do so. Lucy bowed and smiled to friends. Half a dozen girls of her acquaintance were there, some with their parents, some with socially acceptable escorts. On the floor they rubbed against chorus girls, and demi-mondaines, who danced with liberal Westerners or suave New York crooks whose dinner coats had been cut by the best tailors in the city.

For Professor Leonard it was an entirely new and rather disquieting experience. There was a bootlegger in Omega, but he was disreputable; certainly no resident would dream of drinking the forbidden juice in public. He watched the door uneasily, expecting that the vengeful police might swoop down on the place.

"Does your father approve of your coming to places where they sell liquor?" he asked.

"Of course. He comes himself," smiled the girl.

"But it is against the law."

"So is automobile speeding, and jay-walking, and smuggling in presents from Europe, and paying more than fifty cents premium to a speculator for a theater ticket, but we all do it."

"But it breeds disrespect for the law to violate it thus," said Leonard who had been law-abiding so long he forgot he was now a big criminal.

"Pshaw!" laughed the girl. "We obey all the important laws; it's only when the government tries to make you stop something you know perfectly well isn't wrong, isn't morally wrong, I mean, that we disregard it."

"Sophistries."

"Professor," gasped the girl in mock alarm. "I hope you are not a prohibitionist."

"I have no personal prejudice against liquor in moderation," he admitted. "But I don't think it worth risking arrest."

"Don't be alarmed. This place pays high for protection."

"There!" he exclaimed. "That is cer-

tainly morally wrong; bribery and corruption of the authorities. You must admit that."

"Oh, I can't be bothered by such questions. Let's try to dance. I hate the taste of liquor but the only decent dance music is in the night clubs and they nearly all sell. Come on, let's see how you dance at Omega."

The argument ceased while they fought their way through the mob on the floor, packed tighter than crowds in a subway car, but liking it better. And the hours passed until it was 2 A.M., and Lucy, reluctantly, decided to go home.

When she saw her escort pay a check for thirty dollars it occurred to her for the first time that perhaps he could not afford such diversions. Her contrition was sincere, but she could not express it for fear of hurting his feelings.

Lucy spent money herself as freely as she breathed air. It was something that people had to have; all her young men friends appeared to be padded with greenbacks. Professor Leonard had invited her out and she had led him along the usual route. As a result he must have spent a hundred dollars, and she recalled her father saying that professors were paid only two or three thousand a year at Omega.

Lucy liked Frank Leonard, liked him more than any man she knew. When she was with him she had a sense of being complete, of needing nothing to make her happy, of being understood and of understanding.

He appealed to her in several ways, some sort of sympathetic attraction existed between them as far as she were concerned, and she felt reasonably certain that he loved her. Now she had made him spend too much of his money; so she would begin to economize! she gaily proposed that they walk home.

It was a lovely June night, one of those clear, sweet, June nights that one gets in New York, the air balmy without being too warm, the stars overhead as bright as those in the tropics. It is wonderful to be in the country on a rare June night, but Fifth Avenue with its rich stores, its wide sidewalks, its bright lights, its darting automo-

biles, its crisp atmosphere, so different from the night clubs—well, it's pretty nice too.

And when a young man walks up the avenue beside a lovely girl who is glancing at him kindly, whose rich satin wrap, and whose lace gown, whose tiny silver slippers enhance her beauty, he can be just as romantic in his soul as though they walked along a narrow lane beneath a country moon and breathed the fragrance of crimson ramblers and opening roses.

All too soon Leonard delivered Lucy at her front door. Then she extended her hand, permitted him to hold it for a second, waited expectantly, was it for a kiss? If so she was disappointed, for Leonard dared no further. He dropped the hand, wished her happy dreams, and saw her flit within the massive vestibule. Then he hailed a night roving taxi and hastened to his hotel.

As he descended from the taxi he saw a young man emerge from the hotel who held under his arm a little black box. Professor Leonard glanced casually then gave a shout of alarm and dashed toward the man. He recognized John Craven. Craven saw him at the same moment, hastily opened the box, touched something, and then he wasn't there. But Professor Leonard was upon him just the same.

The doorman of the Mastodon emerging tardily stopped short in astonishment, for he saw a very strange spectacle. A man was fighting in the street. He seemed to think he had hold of something with one hand and was aiming blows at the ether with his free hand. Then he seemed to fall and roll over and over, kicking and pummeling as though he were wrestling. Then he suddenly lay flat on the pavement.

"I've seen some queer drunks in my time," mused the doorman as he waddled over toward the recumbent professor, "but this is the first time I ever saw one fight with himself and knock himself out. Hey, you! What's the matter with you?"

Leonard did not respond. He bent over him and discovered that the man was bleeding from a wound on the head and seemed to be unconscious. He also recognized him as a guest of the hotel.

"Must have struck his head against the curbstone when he fell," surmised the

official. "Some folks ought never to drink bootleg liquor."

He permitted Leonard to lay where he was while he entered the hotel for help. With two porters he carried him in and the night clerk grinned as he realized who the victim was.

"It's the man in No. 557. He's a college professor," he observed. "Imagine a college professor getting stewed like that. Carry him up to bed and then get the house physician. He hurt himself badly."

Ten minutes later Professor Leonard came back to consciousness to find himself in his own room with his head bandaged. He felt weak and, for a moment, did not remember exactly what had happened.

"You are all right now," said the physician. "You got a heavy blow. You must have landed on the curb with an awful thump. The wound looks more like a blow from a blackjack."

"That's what it was," declared Leonard. "I was grappling with a thief and he struck me."

"Unfortunately for your story," observed the doctor, dryly, "the doorman saw the whole affair. He says there wasn't a soul within a mile of you and you pulled off a complete fight ending in a knockout, all by yourself."

"Nonsense!"

"Isn't it?" smiled the doctor. "Had a few drinks to-night, hadn't you?"

"Ye-es, but it wasn't that."

"So say we all of us. This fake liquor is responsible for all sorts of queer things and, in your case, you went completely goofy. Now, you lie quiet for twenty-four hours."

With these words of wisdom he took him-

self away, and, as soon as he was gone, Leonard staggered to his feet. A glance told him that the trunk in which his miraculous box had been hidden had been broken open, and that the room had been thoroughly ransacked.

Craven had managed to obtain admission and had burglarized the chamber, a daring thing, but, in his case, there was nothing to fear. Believing as he did that Leonard was a criminal, he was sure he would not report the burglary. He was quite right.

For Professor Leonard the end of the world had come. His secret had been discovered, his apparatus stolen, his life work fallen into the hands of a man who would misuse it. And he could not appeal to the police, for he would have to tell them exactly what it was that Craven had stolen, in which case he would land behind prison bars himself. Besides, how could they capture a thief who had the gift of invisibility? How pursue and run down a man who could vanish into air?

Groaning he fell back upon the bed and slumber, induced by his wound and a draft forced between his teeth by the doctor before he departed, caused him to lay inert for hours. When he woke it was morning.

His head still ached. As he remembered the struggle he had succeeded in getting his hand upon the collar of the invisible man, who struck at him viciously. They had grappled rolled over on the sidewalk. He got both hands on the precious box which gave Craven an opportunity to draw a loaded pocket club and strike him over the head. Then he had walked away with the box of invisibility. Where was he now? Wherever he was he was planning some illegal coup with it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

NEXT WEEK

you will find as our complete Novelette "The Trampling Horde" by Paul L. Anderson, a fascinating picture of life in the cave days long ago. There will also be a corking railroad tale by Don Waters called "In Line of Duty," "Eyes that Fear to See," and many other attractive features, in addition to the rip-roaring new serial of the West "Wild Paradise" announced elsewhere.

INDICATIONS

WHEN I begin to find my job
A little stale, a little zestless.
When you discover that the mob
Is making me a trifle restless.
When I am fidgety at home,
Or start to sniff the breezes blowing
Across the over-arching dome—
You'll know I'm going.

Going, going,
Haven't long to stay,
I don't know where I'm going,
But I'm on my way!

When I don't see the food I eat
Because my eyes afar are staring,
When I, whose dress is fairly neat,
Don't seem to know what I am wearing;
When sight of train or glimpse of ship
Lights in my eyes a wistful glowing,
You'll know I'm due to take a trip,
You'll know I'm going.

Going, going,
Haven't long to bide,
I don't know where I'm going,
But the world is wide.

When some one blows in from the East
Or West—or any old direction,
With tales of famine or of feast,
And I start in on my collection;
You'll know I'll have more tales to tell
And more adventures to be showing
When I get back *this* time and, well,
You'll know I'm going!

Going, going,
Must be getting on,
Going, going, going—
Gone!

Berton Braley.



The Handsome Young Men

By **HULBERT FOOTNER**

Author of "*Madame Storey in the Toils*," "*The Three Thirty-tuos*," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

MY older readers will doubtless remember the great sensation that was caused some twenty-odd years ago by the marriage of Van Sicklen Harker to Cornelia Mittlinger, thus uniting two of the greatest fortunes in the country. In due course this couple had a daughter, who was also christened Cornelia.

The newspapers dubbed her the billion dollar baby. Throughout her childhood items about her feeding bottles, her lace caps and the diamond buckles on her little slippers continually found their way into the press. If ever a child was reared upon publicity she was it.

When she was about ten years old her parents were divorced; and each subsequently married; but Van Harker's second wife and Mrs. Harker's second husband have nothing to do with this story. Throughout her childhood, little Cornelia lived in her own great house surrounded by her own servants; and was visited in turn by her father and mother.

I suppose the old-timers were astonished when they read in the papers of little Cornelia's own love affair. That is the way with children; they will surprise us by growing up.

It may be objected here, that quite



enough about Cornelia Harker's affairs has already been printed. Upon the death of her father recently, the whole thing was rehashed in the press. But that is the very reason I have made up my mind to write it.

The exact truth never has been told; and during the few years that have elapsed since these things happened, so many fables have become attached to the story that it is almost unrecognizable. It is an amazing tale, worth telling for its own sake, quite apart from the prominence of the people concerned in it.

It broke with dramatic suddenness in the account of how Van Sicklen Harker, one of the best known men about town, attempted to thrash a youth named Arpad Rody in the crowded lobby of the great Hotel Palazzo. They were separated by friends.

Rody was described as a handsome young Hungarian, who had been engaged by the hotel as a sort of semi-professional dancer in the tearoom. The cause of the quarrel was kept out of the papers for the moment; but of course it was freely whispered about that Cornelia had become infatuated with her handsome partner in the tango.

A few days later all reason for secrecy vanished, when Cornelia, then eighteen

years old, sent for the reporters to come to her house, and informed them that she was in love with Arpad Rody, and he with her; and that they intended to get married in spite of all the fathers in Christendom.

What a sensation this interview caused! Every phase of the affair was conducted in a blaze of publicity.

Her father countered by summoning the reporters to his house in turn, and informing them that his daughter was under age; that she possessed no means in her own right; and that if she persisted in marrying Rody, whom he termed an unprincipled adventurer, it was his intention to cut her off without a cent. Upon this I believe Rody sued Harker for libel; but this side issue was soon lost sight of in the events which followed.

Cornelia's answer to her father's pronouncement was to march-out of the great house with which he provided her, carrying only a satchel containing her dressing-case and night clothes.

She immediately engaged a room in a cheap boarding house, and hired herself out as cashier in a downtown restaurant. The

proprietor of the restaurant had to call on the police for help in handling the crowds that besieged his place.

After a day or two Harker succeeded in rescuing his daughter out of the restaurant; and a truce was patched up. Each announced to the press that a reconciliation had been effected.

They appeared in public together. Young Arpad Rody was not in evidence. Finally father and daughter departed for a visit to the Grand Cañon in Harker's private car.

In three days Cornelia was back. She announced that her father was too dictatorial for her taste, and she was not surprised that her mother had found it impossible to live with him. She established herself in her big house again, where Arpad Rody was a frequent visitor.

The young couple were photographed together twenty times a day. They ostentatiously visited Tiffany's to buy a ring.

From his house Mr. Harker announced that he and his daughter were sailing on the Baratoria in a week's time for a world tour.

From her house Cornelia announced that she had no intention of leaving New York.

Harker repeated his statement that they were going away.

Cornelia repeated hers that they were not.

The Baratoria was to sail on a Wednesday. On the Monday a fresh sensation was created by the disappearance of Cornelia Harker. She had walked out of her house on Sunday afternoon, and had failed to return. Neither was Arpad Rody to be found. The father was in a state of distraction.

On Tuesday the young pair turned up smiling. They announced that they had been married in Wilmington. They did not return to Cornelia's house, but engaged a suite at the Hotel Palazzo. And everybody supposed that the play was ended—ended as plays ought to be with the discomfiture of the stern father.

Up to this moment it had been pure comedy. It was looked upon as a sort of burlesque on the evils of having too much money.

In view of the ridiculous way in which the girl had been brought up, it was held that Harker had received no worse treatment than he might have expected. Popular opinion anyway, was bound to be on the side of the handsome young lovers, who made a bluff of daring poverty for the sake of each other.

There was nothing for the father to do but to back down as gracefully as he could. Good comedy; everybody was laughing at it.

The Tuesday evening papers carried a brief story of the marriage; and the Wednesday morning papers amplified it. At noon on Wednesday I was startled by hearing the boys cry an extra in our street. Their voices suggested that there really was something the matter, so I hastened down to the door and bought a paper.

What I read in it turned me a little sick with horror. An hour before, Arpad Rody had been found shot dead in the suite at the Palazzo, with his bride lying in a dead faint near by.

II.

I CARRIED the newspaper to Mme. Storey in her private office. This was the long room that I have so often described, furnished with priceless antiques, and lighted by a row of casements at one end looking out on Gramercy Park.

Here at a wide black oaken table with her back to the windows, works my beautiful mistress like a chemist in his laboratory, analyzing souls. Like everybody else she had been interested and amused in following the Harker affair from day to day.

When I showed her the brief, bald announcement, she did not, like others, waste her breath in protestations of horror. Her face turned grave. She said:

"Bella, we will be called on to act in this matter. Send a boy to obtain a room plan of the Palazzo, showing the suite occupied by the young couple. Make a file of the newspaper reports of the case. Get in touch with Inspector Rumsey at Headquarters, and tell him that I will be obliged if he will see that I am furnished with the latest information. Order Crider and Stephens to report at the office."

I was back in my own room attending to these instructions, when the outer door banged open, and four men came tumbling in.

They were well-dressed men; they looked like persons to whom consideration was due; but at the moment all four had a frantic air. I had never seen any of them before. They all cried in a breath:

"Mme. Storey—where is she?"

"Who are you, please? And what do you want of her?" I asked in astonishment.

"I am Van Sicklen Harker," said one. "He is Mr. Van Sicklen Harker," echoed the other three.

"Please be seated," said I, making for the door of Mme. Storey's room.

I doubt if they heard me. They all seemed half beside themselves. When I opened the door they pushed in with me. What could one do?

As it turned out, Mme. Storey was acquainted with Mr. Harker, and she took in the situation at a glance. All four men began talking to her at once.

I picked out such phrases as: "Rody has been shot!—Cornelia taken to Headquarters!—We fear she may be arrested!—No weapon has been found!—"

"Gentlemen!—Gentlemen!" protested Mme. Storey, waving her hands in front of her. "One at a time! Who are these gentlemen, Mr. Harker?"

"My friends—" he said helplessly.

He was truly a pitiable object. A man accustomed to show a good front to the world, his path had always been smoothed for him, and now he suddenly found the ground cut from under him. At the touch of tragedy his weakness was revealed.

His hands shook; his eyes rolled; his tongue stuttered. He looked very young to be the father of a married daughter; not above forty. The other three were merely his toadies; his hangers-on. Harker was the type of millionaire who always carries them around with him.

There was nothing genuine in their distress. They were secretly pleased in being in on such an important affair. They lent a comic touch to the grim situation.

"What is it you want of me?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Help me—help me!" said Harker imploringly.

He seemed to be unable to get any further; and one of his friends stepped forward. He was the most intelligent looking of the three; a clean-shaven man of indeterminate age with a wary blue eye.

He was elegantly dressed and there was a subtle assurance in his manner; Fifth Avenue, Newport, Lenox were stamped on him, like labels on a piece of luggage. A comely man, but a little too soft and smooth.

"Poor Harker is overwhelmed," he said solicitously. He had the flat reedy voice of his type. "I am Algernon Bleeker. I have had the pleasure of being presented to you; but perhaps you have forgotten me."

"I remember you very well," said Mme. Storey with a polite and inscrutable smile.

"I am sorry," she went on, "but I must deal with the principal. If you gentlemen will be good enough to wait in the outer room, I am sure Mr. Harker will soon be able to collect himself."

Mr. Bleeker was much taken aback. All three gentlemen were indignant; but they dared not show it openly in the light of my mistress's cool and level glance.

With furtive glances among themselves, they retired into my office. I have no doubt that Mme. Storey was well abused in there.

"Sit down," said Mme. Storey more kindly to Harker. He dropped into a chair. She pushed the cigarette box toward him. "Perhaps a few puffs will steady you." He mechanically helped himself to a cigarette, but forgot to light it.

"Pull yourself together!" said Mme. Storey in her blunt and cheery fashion. "This is a bad matter; but it might have been worse. It might have been your daughter who was shot."

"They have taken her—to police headquarters," he stammered like a man distraught.

"I understand no weapon was found," said Mme. Storey. "And if she did shoot him, she probably had good cause."

"She *couldn't* have done it!" said poor Harker. "She was infatuated with him,

God help her! He had laid a spell on her with his confounded continental manners; kissing her hand, and so on. After that our honest, rough and ready American boys had no attraction for her."

"Well then, let us find who *did* do it."

"But if they let her go, they will fasten it on me!" cried Harker, all but wringing his hands. "For I was the last one to see them together."

"Did you shoot him?" asked Mme. Storey quite calmly.

"No! No! No!" he cried. "I swear it!"

"Tell me the whole story," said my mistress. "Begin at the point where you learned that your daughter was married to Rody."

He made a visible effort to calm himself.

"That was yesterday afternoon," he said.

"Cornelia called me up."

"What did she say?"

"Very little. Just a bare announcement. Asked me to come to see them at the Palazzo at ten to-day."

"But was it not her place to come to see you?"

He shrugged helplessly. "That is Cornelia's way. I can't do anything with her. Besides, she and my wife do not get along together."

"Did she say what she wanted to see you about?"

"No. But of course I knew. It was to discuss a settlement."

"But you had said you would do nothing for them."

He spread his hands helplessly. "I couldn't let my girl starve."

"Did you hear from them again before this morning?"

He shook his head.

"You went there at ten?"

"Yes."

"Please tell me exactly what happened."

He jumped up agitatedly.

"I can't remember everything," he cried.

"It was too painful—too painful! A long wrangle!—I expected Rody to stand out for all he could get. That didn't trouble me. I thought perhaps it might bring her to her senses to see him revealed in his true colors. But no! She supported him

throughout. She was worse than he! Oh, to see my own child taking sides against me with that young blackguard—it was more than I could bear!—I can't remember everything that was said. It went on for an hour."

"Well, I won't press you now," said Mme. Storey. "But if I am to help you, I shall have to question you again. What was the upshot? Did you agree to a settlement?"

"Yes. I agreed to give them five hundred thousand dollars down and to allow them ten thousand dollars a month hereafter."

"Hm!" said Mme. Storey.

"I wrote a letter to that effect, and signed it," Harker added. "It was found by the police."

"Why was it necessary to write a letter?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Rody exacted it?"

"Supported by your daughter?"

"She wasn't in the room at that moment. She had become faint. She was under the care of her maid."

"How many rooms had they?"

"I can't tell you. Three I think; and two bathrooms. It was a corner suite looking out on Fifty-Seventh Street. You entered it through a private foyer which had six sides, and a door in each side. The corner room was the sitting room. My daughter's maid occupied a room to the left of the sitting room, and my daughter's room was on the right. At Rody's suggestion we went into that room to talk so that the maid could not overhear."

"And it was in that room that the body was found?"

"So I suppose. I do not know for certain."

"What happened when your daughter fell ill?"

"She went back into the sitting room."

"How long were you alone with Rody?"

"I don't know. Five minutes; ten minutes."

"After you had written the letter, did you see your daughter again?"

"No. What was the use? She was on his side. I was too sore and bitter. I got out as quickly as I could."

"Through the sitting room?"

"No. There was a door from the bedroom into the foyer. I went that way."

"Are you able to fix the time when you left?"

"Yes. When I got down into the street I noticed that it was five minutes to eleven."

Mme. Storey glanced at the newspaper.

"The body was found at ten minutes past."

"So they say."

"Mr. Harker, do you own a revolver?" she asked bluntly.

His eyes rolled wildly. "I—I suppose so," he stammered. "In fact I think I have several. But it is many years since I have had any occasion to handle—to look at them."

"But, somehow, one does not forget one's guns," said Mme. Storey mildly. "You must realize how important to you this question is. Can't you give me a more explicit answer?"

"I—I should have to think it over," he said nervously.

Mme. Storey appeared to let the matter go. "One last question," she said. "What did your daughter say upon regaining consciousness?"

"I have not seen her," said Harker. "I am told she has refused to make any statement whatsoever."

III.

MR. HARKER wanted to carry Mme. Storey down to police headquarters that she might interview Cornelia. "No use my trying to talk to her," he said bitterly.

"Very well," Mme. Storey told him, "I'll go. We are rather a large party. Is it necessary for the gentlemen outside to accompany us?"

"They are good friends of mine," said Harker.

"I don't doubt it," rejoined Mme. Storey dryly. "Still—"

"I'll send them away," said Harker.

"Let Mr. Bleecker come with us," suggested my mistress. "I'd like to talk to him."

As we were leaving the office we met our operative, Stephens, coming in in response to my summons. Mme. Storey, dropping

back, instructed him to get hold of Mr. Harker's valet if he was able, and bring him down to Headquarters. They were to wait outside in a car.

The four of us set off down town in the Harker limousine. Mme. Storey sat on the back seat between Mr. Harker and Mr. Bleecker; while I sat on one of the extra seats in front of them.

I do not believe that Harker opened his mouth the whole way. Mme. Storey and Mr. Bleecker talked. She was affable and friendly as if she had repented of snubbing him in the first place; but I, who know her methods so well, could see that she was sounding him out.

He answered like a man without a care on his mind. He had a boyish, impulsive manner, which may have been a pose, but was not unattractive.

From his talk I learned (a) that his family was one of the best in New York; and that he was related to all the other Knickerbockers. (b) That he pursued no regular occupation, but lived the life of a gentleman of leisure. (c) That "Society" was the be-all and end-all of his existence. (d) That for many years he had acted as a sort of superior social secretary to the billionaire Harkers; that is to say, he had supervised all their entertainments, and had advised them whom to cultivate, and whom to drop.

It was clear that Harker leaned on him to an absurd degree. During the drive no reference was made to the immediate tragedy.

We must have been expected at police headquarters, for we found a whole brigade of press photographers lined up on the sidewalk. Mme. Storey's appearance in the case created an additional sensation.

Inside, the whole building was pervaded by an air of excitement; and I may say that it takes something out of the common to get them going down there. The hardest-boiled doorkeeper amongst them was affected by it. Even the high officials, who are in general no respecters of persons, were impressed by the magic name of Harker.

Clearly they did not know exactly what to do with so grand a young lady as Cornelia. They had tried to get information

out of her, but had not liked to push her too hard.

We were taken to the big room on the second floor where a sort of informal investigation was in progress. Everybody connected with the case was coming and going.

We found that the police end was in charge of our old friend Inspector Rumsey. There was also a representative of the district attorney's office present; a man called Harden, whom we were to know only too well in another case.

A well known criminal lawyer named John Jerrold was representing Cornelia. With Jerrold was his clerk, a dark Spanish lad as handsome as Antonius. I did not learn his name until later. It was Pedro d'Escobar.

I wondered about this Jerrold. He was quite well known; but why had they not engaged one of the best in town? I asked myself. A curious thing was that though he was working in Cornelia's interest, he received Mme. Storey with scarcely veiled antagonism.

It made an unpleasant impression on us all. Inspector Rumsey was perfectly willing to allow my mistress to question the girl in the presence of the police, but Jerrold said no.

"I must stand upon the rights of my client," he said stiffly. "A charge may be laid later." So saying, he went off to consult with Cornelia.

Mme. Storey made no comment; but Harker looked at Bleecker in surprise.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

Bleecker shrugged. "Jealous," he said. "He is afraid that Mme. Storey will steal the limelight. These court room stars are as temperamental as opera singers. I'll speak to him."

A succession of prospective witnesses was examined while I was in the room: Cornelia's maid, guests who had occupied nearby rooms, various employees of the hotel. Not any of these people were able to say they had heard the sound of a shot.

I listened to the maid's story with keen interest. At ten o'clock that morning she had admitted Mr. Van Sicklen Harker to the suite, and had ushered him into the sit-

ting room. She had then returned to her own room.

At first she could hear nothing. When the gentlemen began to quarrel she could hear the voices, but could not distinguish anything that was said.

She had no suspicion that there was any serious trouble until, a good while after, her mistress called her into the sitting room. She found Cornelia in an hysterical and half fainting condition.

While she was in the sitting room she could hear the angry voices of the men in the bedroom; but she had been too much concerned about her mistress's condition to take note of anything that they said. She half led, half carried her into the farther bedroom; that is to say, the maid's own room, where Cornelia fainted dead away on the bed.

Some time passed before she succeeded in bringing her to; she was unable to say just how long. When she came to her senses, though she was still weak and shaken, she insisted on returning to the men. She ordered the maid to remain in her own room. During all this time she had said nothing that gave the maid any clew as to what the men were quarreling about.

The maid had remained in her own room for awhile. She could hear nothing. She became very anxious. She finally ventured out into the foyer. Still she could hear nothing from the bedroom opposite. She listened at the door of that room, and no sound came to her. At last she knocked. There was no answer. She tried the door. It was not locked, yet it resisted her at the bottom. She thought somebody was holding it.

There was no sound from inside. Screaming with terror, the maid ran out into the main corridor of the hotel. A number of the guests ran out of their rooms, and various employees were attracted to the scene. The maid refused to return to the suite, and it was a hall porter who actually discovered the tragedy.

This man stated that he had not attempted to enter the bedroom from the foyer, but had gone through the bathroom which lay between bedroom and sitting room. None of the doors was locked.

He beheld Arpad Rody lying on his back on the bed with a gaping wound in his temple. Mrs. Rody was crumpled up in a heap against the door into the foyer. That was why the maid could not open it.

There was a smell of gunpowder in the room. There was no gun visible anywhere. The wound had bled some on the bed, but not so much as you might expect. Rody's clothing was not disarranged in any way, nor did the room show any indications that a struggle had taken place. The body was still warm, of course; but as far as the porter could tell, the man was already dead. The next persons to enter the room were the hotel physician and one of the managers. The porter had then been stationed at the door to keep everybody else out.

The physician deposed that the man was dead when he first looked at him. Death must have been instantaneous. He had been shot with a bullet from a gun of thirty caliber. The gun must have been pressed close to his head, for the edges of the wound showed powder burns. The bullet had passed through his brain and was lodged against the skull on the other side.

The physician had also discovered a swelling on top of the man's head, which suggested that he might have struck his head before death, or had been struck by some instrument—probably a blunt instrument, but he could not say positively. There was no abrasion.

The lady was only in a swoon. She was carried into another room and brought to her senses. The doctor described meanwhile the vain hunt for a weapon. When the lady recovered she had broken away from those who were attending her and had rushed back to her husband's body, where she gave vent to protestations of affection.

Nothing that she said suggested that she had any knowledge of who had shot him. She was incapable at that moment of answering any questions intelligibly.

Mme. Storey asked permission of Inspector Rumsey to put a few questions. This was readily accorded her.

"Doctor," she said, "please tell us more particularly the position in which you found the body."

He said: "There were two beds in the room, *madame*, which were shoved together. The body was lying across both of them, the head pointing toward the windows."

"Were the legs touching the floor?"

"No, *madame*; the body was lying completely across the beds."

"Had the room been made up for the day?"

"No, *madame*; the bedclothing was tumbled."

"The door into the foyer, I take it, was opposite to the windows?"

"Not exactly. The foyer being an irregularly shaped room, the door was cut across one corner of the bedroom."

"I see. And where was the door into the bathroom?"

"Facing the foot of the beds, *madame*."

"These were the only doors in the room?"

"No, *madame*. There was a door near the head of the beds, on the side above the windows. This led into a clothes closet. We looked in there for the gun."

"I get it. We can check this up later on the plan. Now please tell us what sort of man physically the victim was in life."

"A very well made young man, tall and muscular."

"A difficult customer to handle, eh?"

"So I should say, *madame*."

"About what weight?"

"A hundred and seventy pounds."

"Thank you. Now please describe the effect when a man is shot through the brain."

"Why, *madame*, he drops like a felled ox."

"There is no movement afterward?"

"No, *madame*. That is, if he was in motion when he was shot he might stagger forward a step, or spin around. But if he was standing he would drop all of a piece."

"Was there blood anywhere in the room except where it had run down on the bed?"

"No, *madame*."

"Thank you very much. That is all."

IV.

JOHN JERROLD returned to the room and announced to Inspector Rumsey that his

client was now ready to make a full statement to the police.

This made all the members of our party uneasy. We didn't know what was coming. It would have been far better for the girl, we thought, if Mme. Storey had been permitted to talk to her first and to give her some womanly advice.

But Jerrold was evidently determined to keep his client out of my mistress's hands. Mme. Storey was not a lawyer, and she could not therefore seek to interfere between Cornelia and her counsel. She merely shrugged.

Inspector Rumsey ordered the girl to be brought in.

The big room was full of people. I did not know who they all were, nor what their business might be with the case. Inspector Rumsey sat at a desk with his back to the windows; the assistant district attorney was on one side of him, my mistress on the other. I sat close to her with my pencil and book, in case she wished to dictate any memoranda. There was also a police stenographer present.

Lined up behind us was a whole crowd of police; some in uniform, some in plain clothes. The rest of the persons connected with the case formed a group at the other side of the room. No representatives of the press were admitted at this juncture.

A curious thing was that in all that crowd there was not one to claim kinship or friendship with the slain man. Nor did any ever appear during the progress of the case. This young fellow who was described as being so good-looking in life seemed to have appeared out of a void, just as he had now disappeared into another. There was no way of telling if he was as bad as the Harkers made out, because he had no one to speak in his defense.

While he waited for the girl, John Jerrold paced back and forth with an important manner. He was a stocky, middle-aged man with a cold gray eye, and a bristly, clipped mustache. He had once been connected with the district attorney's office, and he had the look of the overbearing prosecutor of fiction. Perhaps that was the reason he had been dropped.

Finally an inner door was opened; a po-

liceman stepped in, followed by the slight figure of Cornelia Rody, and another officer, who closed the door behind him.

You could hear everybody in the room take a breath at the sight of this girl; this heiress to untold millions—this bride of a day, who had perhaps seen her handsome young husband shot down by—well, of course, the same thought was in everybody's mind.

She scarcely looked her eighteen years. It was piteous to think of her as one of the principals in a tragedy. She was very pretty, too, with fine blue eyes and a mass of short, curly, bright brown hair. She was, it goes without saying, most expensively and beautifully dressed. But it was rather shocking to see how perfectly self-assured she was under these circumstances. That was the rich man's child brought up with a crowd of servants to wait upon her.

She was very pale, it is true, but she looked around at the crowd with the greatest coolness, and made a signal of reassurance to her father. She then seated herself in the chair which the young Spaniard, Jerrold's clerk, pushed forward for her; crossed her pretty feet, and folded her hands in her lap.

Her father looked to be at the point of collapse. I did not at first grasp the significance of the signal that Cornelia made to him; but I saw my mistress's face become very grave.

"You wish to make a statement," said Inspector Rumsey to Cornelia.

"Yes," she said composedly. "It was I who shot Arpad Rody."

Everybody in the room gasped. This was not what we expected to hear.

Harker leaped to his feet; and his chair fell over backward. He flung a hand across his eyes.

"No, no, no!" he cried. "It cannot be!"

A policeman pressed him back into his chair. He covered his face.

"Stop!" cried Rumsey sharply to the girl. "Do you realize what you are saying? Are you speaking by advice of counsel?"

"Yes," she said calmly.

"Why did you not warn us of this?" asked Rumsey of Jerrold.

"I thought it best to let her speak for herself," answered Jerrold with a defiant stare.

"You might at least have given her friends some inkling."

Jerrold merely shrugged.

Cornelia, having been duly warned, continued her statement, and it was taken down. She spoke in a low, clear voice; her expression never varied. She related the terrible story without a falter.

"Immediately after the ceremony," she said, "my husband revealed his true nature. It was a relief to be himself, he told me with a sneer. He was coarse and brutal and selfish. His one aim was to get as much money as possible out of my father. When my father came to us this morning, I was so ashamed I could scarcely face him.

"But I had married this man in the face of his opposition, and I felt that it was up to me to stick it out. So I made believe to side with my husband against my father, though it hurt me very much. They quarreled violently, and it got to be more than I could bear. That is how I came to faint."

Cornelia described how, upon feeling ill, she had gone into the sitting room and had called her maid. The maid had carried her to a bed in the farther room, where she lost consciousness for a space.

Continuing, Cornelia said: "When I came to myself, I went back to the room where I had left the men. I found that my father had gone. Arpad was lying on his back against the beds feeling very pleased with himself because he had got the better of my father. He had forced him to sign an agreement to pay us a large sum.

"I didn't mind that, but when he went on to abuse my father—to call him dreadful names after he had been so generous to us—I felt as if I could stand no more. In fact, I didn't know what I was doing. The pistol was lying there on the bureau. I just picked it up and shot him. He never moved afterward."

"But the doctor has stated that the pistol must have been held directly against the man's temple," said Rumsey.

"Yes," assented Cornelia. "Arpad could

not see what I was doing, because of the footboard of the bed. I picked up the pistol from the bureau, and walked to the bed, holding it down low. I reached over the footboard and put it to his head and fired. He never moved afterward."

I think everybody in the room shuddered at the unconscious repetition of that dreadful little phrase.

"Are you accustomed to handling pistols?" Rumsey asked her in rather a shaky voice.

"No. I just pulled the trigger and it went off."

The good inspector was deeply moved; he had a daughter of Cornelia's age.

"This story cannot be true," he said loudly, and looked truculently around, as if defying any of his men to say that he was not acting the part of a good policeman. "If you shot the man as you say, the gun must have been found afterward. What became of the gun?"

"I don't know," replied Cornelia in the same composed voice. "In fact, I cannot remember anything else. It all went black before me."

"The gun was not found," cried the inspector, striking his desk.

"I do not know about that," said Cornelia, with a sort of quiet obstinacy. "I have told you what happened."

"Whose gun was it?" asked the inspector.

"I don't know. I supposed it was Arpad's."

"Had it been lying on the bureau when you were in the room before?"

"I am not sure. I don't think it could have been. It occurred to me that Arpad might have used it to intimidate my father."

"Did you know that your husband possessed such a gun?"

"He had spoken of owning a gun, but I do not know what kind it was. He had never shown it to me."

"You say you fainted immediately upon the firing of the shot?" asked the inspector.

"Yes."

"Then how do you know that your husband never moved?"

"Well, I looked at him first. I didn't faint until it came over me that he was dead."

"You can remember nothing else?"

"Nothing at all."

"But you were found leaning against the door to the foyer. How did you get there?"

"I suppose I must have staggered there. It wouldn't be but half a dozen steps from the bed."

Inspector Rumsey flung himself back in his chair nonplused. He didn't want to believe the girl's story, but as a witness against herself she was too much for him. He looked at my mistress. When she was present, he always leaned on her. "What do you think of this?" his eyes asked.

Mme. Storey shrugged noncommittally.

"Do you want to ask her any questions?" asked Rumsey.

"Not at present," said Mme. Storey.

While Cornelia was signing the statement which had been prepared for her, another plainclothes man entered the room by the outside door and whispered something to Inspector Rumsey.

Rumsey started violently and said:

"Where is it?"

By way of answer, the man took an automatic pistol from his pocket and laid it on Rumsey's desk. Again one could feel the thrill of excitement go through the whole company there.

"Where did you find it?" asked Rumsey.

"On the roof of the dwelling-house which adjoins the Hotel Palazzo on the Fifty-Seventh Street side."

"That would be under the windows of the room where the man was shot?"

"Yes, sir."

Cornelia spoke up quickly: "Oh, it just comes back to me now. In my excitement I threw the gun out of the window. You had better add that to my statement."

"Mr. Jerrold," cried the exasperated inspector, "will you please warn your client for her own sake to confine herself to answering my questions?"

Jerrold retorted sharply, and some confusion resulted. Under cover of it, Mme. Storey leaned toward me and whispered:

"Go down to the door. If Stephens is there with the man I sent him for, bring the man up here."

I found Stephens and another man waiting in a car below. The man's name was Clemmons. He was a tall, weedy-looking youth dressed in a style of cheap elegance—in fact, the typical valet. He was sweating with nervousness at the prospect of having to face the police.

When I reentered the room with Clemmons, Mr. Harker looked at him in mute horror, while his bosom friend Bleecker flushed red with anger.

"Who are you?" asked the inspector.

"I am Mr. Clemmons," answered the youth with a nervous simper. "I work for Mr. Harker."

Mme. Storey whispered to the inspector.

"Have you ever seen this gun before?" asked the inspector.

Clemmons turned the gun over in his hands, and then laid it down on the desk. He glanced wildly around as if seeking a way of escape. He seemed to be incapable of speaking.

"Well, sir?" said the inspector sharply.

"Do I—do I have to answer?" stammered Clemmons.

Algernon Bleecker jumped up.

"I protest!" he cried. "This man is entitled to the advice of counsel."

"Be silent, sir!" cried Inspector Rumsey. "Nobody suspects this man of having committed the crime." He looked at Clemmons. "Answer my question."

"It is Mr. Harker's gun," murmured the valet.

Everybody in the room strained forward to hear. The silence was breathless.

"Are you sure of that?" demanded the inspector.

Clemmons nodded. "I cleaned it only last week," he murmured. "I saw Mr. Harker take it out of the drawer this morning before he went out. He did not know that I saw him take it."

You could hear a long breath escape from the strained listeners.

Inspector Rumsey involuntarily looked over at Cornelia. It was then that the girl betrayed her only symptoms of cracking under the strain.

"What of it?" she cried hysterically. "I told you the truth! Arpad was alive after my father had left the hotel! I swear it!"

I heard a slight sound on the other side of me. Then Mr. Bleecker cried excitedly:

"Mr. Harker has fainted! A glass of water, please!"

The faithful toady conveyed by his horrified tones that the heavens had fallen, and all business must stop. But I am afraid that nobody else in that room was much impressed by the multi-millionaire's greatness at that moment.

V.

CORNELIA'S confession stood up in spite of the valet's disclosure. No person of discernment who heard the girl make that confession believed a word of it—but there it was! She stuck to it through thick and thin; and even added convincing little details from time to time.

Harker was obliged to change his story. Who could tell whether his second version was any nearer the truth than the first? He said:

"It is true that I took my pistol with me when I went to see Rody. I was beside myself with rage and grief, and it seemed to me when the truth came out, that nobody would blame me for shooting that black-guard. In the ugly scene that followed after I got to the hotel, he revealed his nature to be even more brutal and coarse than I had expected. The thought that my little girl was committed to the keeping of such a scoundrel drove me mad! It seemed providential to me when Cornelia left us together; and I pulled out my gun.

"If the intention of shooting him is a crime I am ready to take my punishment. But I did not shoot him. He jumped on me and disarmed me. He was stronger than I. He then pointed the gun at my head and made me write the agreement that I left behind me. As I ran out of the room I heard him fling the gun on the bureau. This is the truth! But Cornelia could not have shot him either. Whatever she may say now, she was completely infatuated with the man!"

A curious situation resulted. Whenever

Harker was permitted to see his daughter, he begged and implored her to take back her confession, but she stood firm. Throughout the whole affair she displayed much more strength of character than her father. If she had weakened, Harker would have been promptly arrested, but as long as her confession stood, the police could not touch him.

Everybody believed that Harker had shot Rody, and nobody was inclined to blame him for that. It was supposed that Cornelia knew her father had done it, even if she had not actually seen him fire the shot, and that she was lying to save him.

And Harker, people thought, was withholding his confession, because he considered that Cornelia's youth and innocence would stand a better chance with a jury. If this was the true explanation of the situation, it certainly showed up poor Harker in a contemptible light; and in my heart I never believed it.

Harker was a weak man, and somewhat spoiled by too much wealth; but there was something manly and likable in him underneath. And certainly the poor fellow was suffering the torments of the damned.

No other explanation was forthcoming. If neither one of the Harkers had shot Arpad Rody we were up against a blank wall. The whole action was narrowed down to fifteen or twenty minutes.

No other person had been seen to enter or leave the hotel suite. In a hotel like the Palazzo they have watchers and servants in every corridor. Cornelia's maid had never left the suite; and the outer door had been locked throughout. One of the most baffling features of the affair was that nobody had heard the shot.

What my mistress thought about the case at this stage, I do not know. She went about her investigation with an inscrutable smile.

I ought to mention that immediately after the inquiry in Inspector Rumsey's office which I have described, she proceeded to the Palazzo Hotel where she made a patient survey of the scene of the crime.

If it was a fact that the Harkers and their advisers had agreed amongst themselves on the course of action they were fol-

lowing, it certainly proved to be a political one. For Cornelia became the popular heroine of the day.

It was true she had to be confined in the city prison, but if one could believe all one heard, she was treated there like a royal guest of the state. She received enough flowers and candy, it was said, to furnish an entire hospital. Two secretaries were required to attend to her mail. Everybody knew that her trial would be a mere form; no jury on earth would have convicted her.

Cornelia was, naturally, a sweet little thing; and the course she was taking, mistaken though it might be, proved the goodness of her heart. But long before this happened she had been spoiled by her bad upbringing; and the adulation she received in prison completed the turning of her pretty head.

She became as puffed up with vanity as a little pigeon. It was very difficult to deal with her. As a matter of fact somebody had prejudiced her against Mme. Storey in the beginning. After one or two attempts to create a better understanding, Mme. Storey was obliged to disregard her in the unraveling of the case.

I might say that, saving Mme. Storey and Inspector Rumsey, everybody connected with the case seemed to become intoxicated with the attendant publicity. That is not to be wondered at perhaps, when you consider that it was the most sensational case that had ever come before the public up to that time.

The newspapers seemed to give up everything during those few days. The reporters and photographers dogged our footsteps. Good heavens! you had the feeling of being spied upon even in your bed.

The publicity attached to our cases always angers me. Maybe if I were the beautiful young heiress to millions I would feel differently.

Too much publicity has a curious effect on people. Algernon Bleecker, I thought, made a perfect ass of himself, the way he thrust himself forward as Van Sicklen Harker's most intimate friend, and undertook to speak for Harker in everything.

The others were just as bad. Even the valet, Clemmons, went about town attended

by a whole train of sycophants hanging upon his slightest word. As for Cornelia, she issued interviews from her cell on every conceivable subject, whether she knew anything about it or not, just like royalty.

Cornelia was thrown entirely into the hands of John Jerrold. I considered this very unfortunate. I did not believe that Jerrold was actuated by childish jealousy in his antagonism to my mistress. I suspected a more sinister motive. When I suggested this to my mistress she merely smiled.

I hate the whole multi-millionaire atmosphere anyway. There is more wire-pulling, underhand dealing and general crookedness among their hangers-on than in ward politics.

When Jerrold did not go himself to visit Cornelia in the prison, he employed that handsome Spanish lad, Pedro d'Escobar, whom I have spoken of, as his messenger.

One day when Mme. Storey and I went to the prison to talk to Cornelia—and this, by the way, was the last occasion on which my mistress made any attempt to see the girl she was trying to save—we were told at the gate that Miss Harker—Cornelia had resumed her maiden name for its effect on the public—was already in the visitors' room engaged with her counsel. We had to wait in the rotunda at some little distance from the door, but in full view of it. It was fairly dark where we were.

While we sat there, the door into the visitors' room was opened, and for an instant we saw two figures framed in the doorway, sharply silhouetted against the strong light within. It was Cornelia and—not the gross form of Jerrold, but the slender one of young d'Escobar.

A very pretty pose; the graceful girl offering her hand to the youth, who took it in his own, and gazed at her, as we could see even at that distance, with an expression of adoration. He then bent his body with infinite grace, and kissed her hand.

This troubled me greatly, but I could not instantly piece together the reasons for it. Then a light broke on me. I glanced at my mistress. She was surveying the scene with a peculiar smile.

"Shall we go in?" I asked.

She slowly shook her head. "No need now," she said enigmatically. "This has revealed more than I would ever get out of the girl."

She drew me over to the other side of the rotunda where d'Escobar would not pass us on the way out. I watched him with the keenest interest.

He was almost the perfect Latin type of male beauty with large, full dark eyes, features of a charming regularity, and an air of suppressed passion. He was not very big; but well-knit and vigorous. He ought to have been acting in the pictures.

He was too good-looking for one to be able to judge anything about his character. He might have been either rogue or saint.

After he had left, Mme. Storey and I made our way out of the building.

VI.

On the following day we ran into young d'Escobar at the Harker house where he had been sent on some errand by Cornelia. A sidelong look from my mistress; an alluring smile was sufficient; the youth succumbed forthwith.

He was apt in gallantry; in fact that was all there was to him; he had more gallantry than good sense. It must be remembered though, that my mistress was an extremely beautiful woman. Beside her, little Cornelia was as a candle to a star.

A moment later they were whispering and smiling apart, and I was not surprised therefore, when the young Spaniard turned up at our office that afternoon.

He was most beautifully turned out, and his big black eyes were shining. His manners, even toward me, were charming. I had it in mind, though, that a charming young man can be a bad egg, too.

It was about four thirty, and tea had been had in for him. My mistress had put on one of her beautiful Fortuny gowns for his benefit. When I ushered him into the big room, she looked at me in a certain way, and reached under her desk.

This was to signify to me that I was not expected to remain in the room; but was to listen to all that took place. She had turned on the dictaphone.

Back in my own room, I locked the outer door to forestall possible interruptions, and clapped the headpiece over my ears. The young man talked an attractive jargon of American slang with a strong Spanish accent. I shall not attempt to reproduce the accent. He said:

"I would catch the devil from my boss if he knew I was here!"

"Why?" asked Mme. Storey lazily.

"He doesn't like you—very bad taste, I say."

"Why?" she asked again.

"I don't know. He thinks you're trying to—what do you say?—gum his game somehow."

"I don't know what his game is," said Mme. Storey, laughing.

"To the dickens with him!" said the young man. "I shan't tell him where I've been. *Dios!* how beautiful you are when you show your white teeeth!"

"Like the wolf in Red Riding Hood," suggested Mme. Storey, airily.

"Voolf? What is that?" he asked in a surprised voice.

"Oh, never mind."

"They tell me you are the greatest woman in New York," he went on; "and for myself I can see you are the most beautiful! How good of you to let me come here!"

"You're a fast worker, aren't you?" she remarked. "Here's your tea."

"A fast worker?" he said inquiringly. "Oh, I get you! That's a good one. I must remember that."

"How about little Harker?" suggested Mme. Storey.

"Oh, Mees 'Arker," he said carelessly. "I have to make love to her in the way of duty, but my heart is not in it. But with you—"

Mme. Storey interrupted him. "What do you mean, duty?"

"A widow," he said; "and so rich! One owes it to one's self."

"I suppose so," observed Mme. Storey dryly. "Unfortunately in this country a man is expected to be faithful even to a rich wife."

"How tiresome!" said d'Escobar. "We manage better on the Continent."

Their conversation—which I took down

at the time—was too long to reproduce in its entirety. Suffice it to say that this young sprig was like wax in the clever hands of my mistress.

Without committing herself to anything, she allowed him to suppose that his big black eyes had found a joint in her armor, and he became a little drunk with gratified vanity. She led him into making many admissions about himself.

He knew how dangerous his situation was, for he was continually pulling himself up on the verge of some important disclosure. If he had had good sense he would never have come near our shop; it was about as safe for him as a lion's den; but my mistress's beauty and allure had been too strong for him. I could see—or hear, rather—that he thought he was being very prudent; he had no idea how much he was giving away.

He said he had been in America for a year. He claimed to be descended from old Spanish grandee stock, but that was palpably a fiction. Under the veneer of elegance he revealed a sharp and common nature. I suspect that he had assumed the aristocratic name of d'Escobar for American use.

We gathered that in Madrid he had really been of that flash type of sporting character which is common to great cities all over the world; a hanger-on of the bull-ring; and an associate of the most disreputable persons. He had been put to all sorts of shifts to make a living; and had unquestionably known what it was to go hungry.

Among other expedients he had occasionally acted as guide to tourists in Madrid; and in this way he had become acquainted with an American, who had offered to bring him to the United States and put him in the way of winning a rich wife.

This interesting fact slipped out inadvertently, and d'Escobar, laughing, instantly sought to turn it into a joke. Mme. Storey appeared to accept it as a joke and allowed him to change the subject.

By the most circuitous course she gradually led him back to the matter of his American benefactor, and d'Escobar never realized whither he was being steered. He

was very leery of giving any information in this direction. He could not be got to say anything definite about the man.

He repeated that he had been given the money for his passage to America, but claimed that he had never seen the man afterward. Mme. Storey could not question d'Escobar directly, of course.

"What a funny man!" she remarked carelessly.

"Oh, he had so much money he didn't know what to do with it," said d'Escobar.

"Then I hope he staked you well."

"Staked me?"

"Gave you money I mean, to get a start with."

"No. Only for my passage."

"What! Didn't he put you in the way of getting a job? Didn't he even give you letters to his acquaintances in America?"

"No."

"What a heartless way to act!"

"Oh, he was a rich and impulsive *señor*. Five minutes after he had given me the money he had forgotten me."

"Well, I must say you showed pluck in venturing across the world to an unknown country where you couldn't even speak the language."

"What would you?" said d'Escobar; and I could imagine the careless shrug that accompanied the words. "My position in Madrid was hopeless. What is a gentleman to do without money? I am the last of my family; I had no influential relatives. In Spain a d'Escobar could not soil his hands with common labor; but in America it makes no difference."

"That's a fine spirit," said Mme. Storey flatteringly.

"Oh, don't let's talk about me," he begged her. "Let me go on telling you how beautiful you are! I could never tire of that!"

I could imagine the slightly bored smile with which my mistress received this. But she gave him his head; and he rhapsodized to his heart's content. She encouraged him with sly flattery. After awhile she said:

"You poor boy! Do you know I am haunted by the thought of you landing in America friendless and without a cent!"

At this moment he was slightly giddy

with gratified vanity; and he answered thoughtlessly: "Oh, I was well taken care of!"

To cover his slip—for she did not want him to break down, Mme. Storey said quickly: "By your fellow Spaniards I suppose."

"Yes," he answered, "Spaniards. They got me jobs of one kind and another. As soon as I learned English I was all right."

"You speak it awfully well."

"Well, it was a question of life or death," he said with a laugh.

"Did you have to live in one of those awful immigrant boarding houses down near the Battery?" asked my mistress solicitously.

"No; but it wasn't much better. It was a tall house overhanging a cliff with rocks at the bottom and the river. You could toss things out of our windows right in the water."

"Oh, somewhere out of town," said Mme. Storey.

"No. It is right here in New York. The Sound steamers go by it."

"I never heard of any cliffs in New York," said Mme. Storey to lead him on.

"It was a polyglot house," he said. "There were six of us; a Frenchman, a Belgian, two Italians, a Rumanian and me."

"All young fellows?" asked Mme. Storey idly.

"All young."

"Only six of you in that big house? That doesn't sound poverty-stricken."

"Oh, we only had a flat on the ground floor. It was a fifteen family house."

"Well, with six young fellows together, I expect you had a lively time."

"No. They kept us too strict. The countess was an old devil!"

"The countess?"

"Oh, just a name we had for the French housekeeper. I was thankful when I graduated. All day long they kept us at our lessons like schoolboys; English and deportment."

Mme. Storey took pains not to notice this slip, but he immediately became conscious of it.

"Of course I didn't have to have any lessons in deportment," he hastily added

laughing. "But the other fellows were ignorant peasants. They had to be taught how to behave before they could expect to get jobs in America."

"Oh, of course," said Mme. Storey.

For awhile he was uneasy, evidently fearing that he had given too much away. But my mistress's bland and careless manner gradually restored his confidence. She applied judicious flattery again; and made no further attempt to get anything out of him.

When he left, he put his heels together, and bowing low from the waist, kissed her hand in the best continental manner. It was charming. Mme. Storey invited him to come to her house on the following night. There is nothing like striking while the iron is hot.

VII.

He did not come to Mme. Storey's house. In fact we never saw him again. That handsome and too talkative young man simply vanished.

On the following day another man replaced him in the rôle of John Jerrold's assistant. This one was obviously no more nor less than a lawyer's clerk; a dull, plodding fellow with no pretensions to gallantry. He does not figure in the story in any way.

We had already set on foot cautious inquiries among Jerrold's employees; and we learned that d'Escobar had simply not turned up for business the day before; and that nobody in the office knew where he was. Jerrold had given it out, that he knew nothing about the young man's movements outside office hours, and was not sufficiently interested to inquire. From the same source we obtained d'Escobar's last address.

In company with Inspector Rumsey and myself, Mme. Storey immediately proceeded there. It was an old-fashioned walk-up apartment house on One Hundred and Fourth Street, which had been subdivided into small suites, which were let furnished by the week. A thoroughly respectable house with, however, no pretenses to style.

In such a house the tenants come and go with great frequency; d'Escobar had not

been established there more than a fortnight; but his uncommon good looks had fixed him in the minds of the employees. They called him "the handsome dago."

From the negro telephone boy we got a fairly straight story. This was a Friday. On Wednesday evening the boy said, that would be the evening of the day on which d'Escobar had tea at our office, the young Spaniard was called down to the telephone about eight o'clock. There were no extension phones in the building.

The negro was standing beside him while he talked over the wire. It was very brief. Somebody must have told him he was wanted somewhere, for d'Escobar had said: "Is anything the matter?" He had apparently received a reassuring answer. He had then said: "All right, I'll come right away." The other person then said something, to which d'Escobar replied: "Very well. I'll be careful." He then hung up.

He asked the telephone boy to get him a taxi; and went up to his flat for his hat and coat. His flat was the second floor front, west. A taxi had been procured from a garage in One Hundred and Seventh Street. It would be easy to find the man who drove it.

D'Escobar had never returned. They knew that because the maid had reported his bed had not been slept in. He had carried no bag, nor anything at all in his hand when he went away.

While Inspector Rumsey went to look up the chauffeur, Mme. Storey and I were let into the flat. It was the usual thing; parlor, bedroom and bath; furnished in a cheap style, but comfortable enough. The most curious thing about it was, that the youth who lived there, apparently had no personal belongings; no photographs; no knick-knacks; nothing but some packets of cigarettes and a couple of dog-eared paper-covered novels in Spanish, with lurid pictures on the covers.

And his clothes of course; he had plenty of those; and fine ones, too; all neatly put away on hangers in the wardrobe.

The place was in apple pie order; but Mme. Storey's sharp eyes presently discovered evidence that it had been ransacked since the owner left. The lock of d'Esco-

bar's trunk had recently been forced; the marks of the break were fresh. The contents of the bureau drawers were tumbled in a way that was incompatible with the orderliness of everything else.

Of the coats hanging in the wardrobe, some of the fronts had been carelessly turned back, as by somebody hastily feeling for the breast pockets. There was a little desk by the front windows, and a clean sweep had been made of that. Even the desk blotter had been carried away, as if in fear that it might reveal some tell-tale line of writing in a mirror.

The negro boy, who had frequently been in the room, insisted that there had been a blotter on the desk two days before.

"Has any person visited these rooms to-day or yesterday?" Mme. Storey asked him.

"Not that I know of, ma'am."

"But you would know if anybody had been here?"

"All kinds of strangers come in and out the house, ma'am. I don't question them if they seem to know where they're going."

"Has any other boy been on duty in the hall?"

"Yes'm, I got a relief."

"This room is right over where you sit. If anybody had entered these rooms while you were on duty, you must have heard them."

"Yes'm. I reckon so."

"Have you seen a good-looking young foreign man passing in or out of the house to-day or yesterday?"

"No, ma'am."

"You would have taken note of such a one as that?"

"Yes'm. I sure would."

The other boy having been sent for, he returned the same answers.

Finally Mme. Storey asked: "What time is the house closed?"

"Eleven o'clock, ma'am. The switch-board is closed; and the outer door locked."

"Every tenant has a key to the outer door, of course?"

"Yes'm. Every tenant gets two sets."

Mme. Storey pointed to three keys on a string, which were hanging inside the entrance door to the flat.

"There is one set," she said. "Therefore, the person who ransacked this flat must have had d'Escobar's keys." She turned away to the window.

"What do you think of it?" I asked anxiously.

"I think," she answered in a grave, low tone, "that our young friend has paid for his indiscretions to me, with his life."

I turned a little sick with horror. Another murder! "Oh!" I breathed. At that moment I could think only of the young man's beauty.

She looked at me queerly.

"I can't feel very sorry for him, Bella," she said quite coolly. "This is a case of my country first. I don't care how many of these scoundrelly young foreigners bite the dust if I am enabled thereby to break up their vile traffic!"

I stared at her in amazement. At the moment, I was not yet able to grasp the thing in its entirety.

Inspector Rumsey came in. He had got hold of the taxicab driver, who told him that d'Escobar had ordered him to drive to the Metropolitan Building at No. 1 Madison Avenue. The driver was interested in his fare because he said, the handsome young foreigner reminded him of—(He named a famous motion picture star). And that seemed a funny address to give after business hours. So after he had set d'Escobar down, he drove on a little way, and stopped to watch him.

It appeared that d'Escobar was only waiting for another taxi. He hailed the first one that came along, and was driven past the waiting car without noticing it. The chauffeur's curiosity was now highly excited; and he went to the trouble of taking down the number of the second taxi. He had furnished it to Inspector Rumsey.

There was nothing further to be learned at the Hundred and Fourth Street house, and we separated in our several directions for dinner. At eight o'clock we came together again at Mme. Storey's place. Inspector Rumsey had brought along the second taxi-driver, and his car was at the door.

This man had a clear recollection of his foreign-looking fare of two nights before.

He had driven d'Escobar to the corner of Pleasant Avenue and a street in the Seventies. Pleasant Avenue is on the far East Side. It corresponds to Avenue D farther down town.

Mme. Storey suggested that we follow forthwith. She dressed herself in an inconspicuous coat and hat, and we set forth in the taxi.

We found that Pleasant Avenue had been named without any regard to the fitness of things. It was a wide, raw, miscellaneous kind of thoroughfare on the edge of the island. It was paved with granite blocks.

At the point where we got out of the taxi, the roadway was torn up for repair, and further progress was blocked by a barrier. This driver's curiosity had not been excited by his fare, and he could give us no information as to what had become of him when he stepped out of the cab.

Telling the man to wait, we walked on up the street at a venture. This out of the way avenue was well lighted, but was evidently only sparsely frequented after night-fall.

A little way along we came to a great pile of granite blocks alongside the sidewalk. On the sidewalk itself a very old man was seated in a kitchen chair, which was tipped back against the pile of stones.

His feet were cocked up on a rung of the chair, his derby was pulled over his eyes, and he was smoking a disreputable pipe with evident enjoyment. Beside him on the pavement stood a watchman's lantern.

"He was probably sitting there two nights ago," murmured Mme. Storey. "Let us ask him."

The old man betrayed no sign of being aware of our approach; but as soon as he was spoken to, we realized that he had been watching us.

"Good evening," began Mme. Storey.

"Even', mum." He looked up at her sharply, but did not otherwise move. He was too old to be polite.

"Is it your job to watch these stones all night?" she asked.

"So it would seem 'um."

"But I shouldn't think anybody would steal paving stones!"

This evidently touched a sore point. "They'd steal anythin', mum," he said indignantly. "It ain't but two nights ago, since two of these very blocks was pinched. They was missed in the morning because the pile was perfectly regular. I caught hell for it."

Now all three of us were thinking about two nights ago, and this simple fact seemed therefore as if it might have some strange significance for us.

"What on earth would the thief want of them?" asked Mme. Storey.

"You kin search me, mum. No good purpose I'll be bound."

"No good purpose," she agreed thoughtfully.

I shivered.

"You see that taxicab standing there?" said Mme. Storey.

"Well, I still got my eyesight, mum."

"Did you see a taxicab stop in the same spot two nights ago, just at this time or a few minutes later?"

"Meanin' no disrespect', but what is that to you, mum?"

Turning back his coat, Inspector Rumsey exhibited the police badge. The old man's chair came to the pavement with a thump. He stood up, and pulled off the battered derby.

"Excuse me, captain. And you, mum. But how was I to know? Yes, I see'd a taxi stop there two nights ago this time. They ain't common in these parts."

"Did you see a man get out?"

"Yes'm."

"What sort of man?"

"Handsome young foreign gent. Dressed real elegant."

"That is the man. Did you see where he went?"

"Sure, mum. I ain't got much to occupy myself. I watches every little thing. This young foreign gent came right by here, and walked on up the avenue to the corner of the street. Then he turned down toward the river."

"Did you see him come back?"

"No'm. He never come this way again."

Mme. Storey gave him a tip, and we left him bowing and tipping the ridiculous derby.

We turned down the street the watchman had indicated. It was no more than a short half block to the river. The end of it was closed by a low stone parapet, topped by an iron railing.

Looking through the bars, you beheld the East River some forty or fifty feet below you; heaving silently and restlessly; showing a furtive gleam under the night sky.

And on the other side lay Blackwell's Island with its forbidding institutional buildings, already darkened for the night. Beyond that again, the other channel of the river; and the sparkling lights of the Long Island shore.

When my mistress and I looked at the last house on the south side of the street, I think, we both knew what to expect. It was a five-story, double flat-house of the style that was erected in such numbers twenty-five years ago and more; a fifteen family house; every New Yorker knows them.

It is the type which intervenes between the villainous old "dumb-bell" tenement, and the "new-law" house. On the river side it fairly overhung the cliff, being supported on a tall retaining wall with buttresses. Looking down we could see the rocks at the foot of the cliff. These would be partly covered when the tide rose.

Mme. Storey and I exchanged a look. By what a strange chain of circumstances we had been led to the very house that we wished to find!

Seeing us look at each other, Inspector Rumsey asked if we knew the house.

"It is the house which has been described to us as containing the headquarters of the gang," said Mme. Storey. "The ground floor flat on the river side."

The front windows of that flat were dark. We could not see, of course, if there was any light in the rear. We knew the plan of that flat just as well as if we had been in it.

On the ground floor the usual "private hall" of each flat is cut off by the entrance hall; and the rooms open out of each other in a string; sitting-room; one or two narrow bedrooms; dining-room and kitchen. On the other side of the entrance there would be an exactly similar flat; and in the rear

of the building, a four or five room flat arranged in the form of a square.

My mistress was peering around. By this time I was able to follow her thought.

"However could they get down to the rocks?" I asked.

"What would they want to get down there for?" asked Rumsey innocently.

Mme. Storey pointed to a narrow opening at the end of the parapet, across the road from the flat-house. Here we found a rough, wooden stairway leading down to a ramshackle structure near the water's edge. There was a little makeshift landing there; it was evidently a sort of bathing establishment for the neighborhood.

We saw that from the foot of the steps one could easily make one's way back over the rocks to a point under the windows of the flat-house.

Mme. Storey said to Inspector Rumsey: "I suggest that the police come up the river in a launch to-night, and grapple for a body off those rocks. Let them show no lights, and work with the greatest care, in order to avoid attracting the attention of anybody in the flat. If a body should be found, let the fact be concealed, until we can consult together."

"But the tide runs up and down here like a mill-race," objected the inspector. "A body thrown in here might be found miles away."

"Not if it was weighted down with two granite blocks," said Mme. Storey gravely.

VIII.

THAT night the body of Pedro d'Escobar was fished up from the bottom of the East River. It was found tied to a heavy canvas bag which contained the two paving stones. He had been garroted.

The body was carried to a private undertaking establishment; and for the time being, no word of the gruesome find was allowed to reach the press. Inspector Rumsey wanted to raid the flat where the murder had certainly been committed, but Mme. Storey shook her head.

"You would not find the principal there," she said, "and he's the only one who matters. If either of us makes the

slightest false move, he will escape us forever."

"Well, I'll see that the occupants are kept under surveillance," said Rumsey.

Mme. Storey still objected. "If any strange man were to appear in that quiet street, no matter if he were the cleverest sleuth on your staff, they would be sure to take alarm. Leave them to me. I will watch them myself."

Rumsey has unbounded confidence in my mistress—he has good reason for it; but he looked at her dubiously. "How could you—in such a neighborhood—" he began.

"You'll see," she answered smiling.

From that point on, Mme. Storey gave no direct attention to the murder of Arpad Rody. We would gradually approach that, she said, by way of the killing of the other handsome young foreigner. I could perceive the general outline of her theory; but I was still in a fog as to the actual connection between the two crimes.

We left the Harker case to be thrashed out in the newspapers; and day by day they continued to make the most of it. To be sure, after the sensational disclosures of the first day, the result of their labors was mostly chaff; but it seemed to make little difference to the readers; they subscribed for it just as eagerly.

Two great parties were formed amongst the public; those who thought Van Sicklen Harker had fired the fatal shot; and those who ascribed it to Cornelia. Feeling ran high, and the newspapers were bombarded with letters. Both parties, however, were able to unite in idolizing little Cornelia.

The "news" consisted almost exclusively of the successive efforts of the various persons connected with the case to break into the headlines. I remember that Algernon Bleeker succeeded in holding the center of the stage for an entire day by getting himself ejected from the district attorney's office. I suppose he had made an intolerable nuisance of himself there, by reason of his self-imposed activities on behalf of the Harkers.

The unfortunate district attorney had a hard row to hoe anyhow. He was the villain of the piece. He had to prosecute the public idol.

In the absence of any real news, the daily interview with Cornelia was the leading feature. Once a day in the prison, Cornelia held a levee for the gentlemen and ladies of the press. It was really rather scandalous; but the tide of popular interest in the case was simply not to be resisted.

Every day for my sins, I had to wade through many columns of the nonsense thus produced, in order to make sure that nothing of significance escaped Mme. Storey's attention.

The only time I was ever rewarded for my patience was when I stumbled on this paragraph, in one of the more intelligent papers:

The interview—with Cornelia—is limited to one hour. Every day between fifty and sixty newspaper men and women attend. In addition to the local press, every leading newspaper in the country has assigned a special writer to the case. As it would be impossible within this brief period of time for so many people to question Miss Harker, it became necessary for them to elect one of their number to talk to her. Miss Harker herself was invited to nominate the interlocutor, and her choice fell upon Mr. Albert Fleury, of the *New York Universe*.

Mr. Fleury is probably the youngest reporter on the case, and certainly the newest recruit to newspaperdom. His article yesterday on "The Ideals of Cornelia Harker" was especially pleasing to that young lady. She held a clipping of it in her hand during the interview to-day. Mr. Fleury is a Belgian. He is an exceedingly personable young man; and his elegant manners are the despair of the graduates of Park Row.

When I showed this to Mme. Storey she said: "What, another? Have you seen his articles?"

"Yes," said I. "They attracted my attention because they were even more fulsome than the general run."

"H-m!" she observed, and reached for the telephone to call up Morrow, managing editor of the *Universe*, who was an acquaintance of hers.

Morrow said the young man had been recommended to him by Sterner, a vice president of the Corlears Trust; the banker said Fleury had brought a letter of introduction from the president of the Union Leather Company, one of their largest cus-

tomers; the leather manufacturer said he had him from John Jerrold, the well-known lawyer.

"H-m!" ejaculated Mme. Storey again. She did not call up John Jerrold.

"Bella," she said, "I will write a meaningless letter to Cornelia, which will nevertheless sound important. You carry it down to her, taking care to deliver it while the reception to the press is going on. Then you can have a look at this young man."

This is the report that I brought back to my mistress:

"Albert Fleury is several years older than d'Escobar, and, I should say a much warier and more astute young man. I think he must have lived in America for a longer space of time, because he is thoroughly on to our ways, and can speak English with scarcely a trace of accent. But when he spoke to Cornelia I noticed that he stuck on the French accent. Like d'Escobar, he is extremely good-looking, but in an entirely different style, being tall, blond, with strongly chiseled aquiline features that give him a bold look.

"When he speaks to Cornelia he allows a rapt look to come into his eyes, and a hushed tone into his voice. She is fascinated. The other reporters hate him; but he has firmly intrenched himself in her favor, and he doesn't care. His eyes are false and shallow; but she can't see that.

"During the few minutes that I was in the room, Fleury never appeared to look at me. He was *too* indifferent. It suggested to me that he was highly conscious of my presence; and on fire to learn what had brought me. He has undoubtedly been warned against us."

"Well, naturally," said Mme. Storey. "After what has happened."

IX.

DURING the early part of my association with Mme. Storey, I was solely the secretary and office manager; there was never any question of my doing work in the field. Then in the Melanie Soupert affair, circumstances forced me to play the part of Canada Annie, and it was considered that I acquitted myself quite well.

Since then I have been compelled to adopt a disguise on several occasions. Women operatives of the exact type that we require are very hard to find. And I have the sort of ordinary face that does not unduly impress itself on the memory. To be sure I have red hair; but that may be dyed black, or covered with a wig.

A few hours after Inspector Rumsey brought us the news of the recovery of d'Escobar's body, Mme. Storey and I might have been seen drifting up the sidewalk of Pleasant Avenue; but our closest acquaintances would never have recognized us.

Mme. Storey was wearing a sandy wig, upon which was perched an odd little black bonnet; and her lovely complexion was made up to look coarsened and spoiled. Her figure was stuffed out under a cotton dress, and an old-fashioned black mantle.

She was the good-natured New York cleaning-woman to the life—of Irish extraction. It was a treat to see how well she did the walk of a stout, middle-aged woman, still vigorous; coming down on the flat of her foot with every step.

I was a thinner, paler, younger edition of the same; not so good-humored. My hair had been rendered drab and lifeless with water color; and was screwed into a hard knot. I was wearing a bedraggled lace hat, and a ridiculous fawn-colored jacket which was inches too big in the bust; and cocked up like a sparrow's tail behind.

My skirt hung down behind in that dejected manner which is peculiar to scrub-women. All these were genuine old clothes; we made sure they were properly fumigated.

We walked a foot or two apart, talking so that anybody might hear. Mme. Storey did most of the talking; she has the East Side jargon down pat, whereas I have to think what I am saying. She is richly humorous at such moments.

It is her custom when we make these excursions into the lower world, to introduce me as a superior person, "who reads books." Her theory is, the more fantastic the part, the easier it is to get away with it. You can get away with anything, she says, so long as you can contrive not to look self-conscious.

Mme. Storey also possesses to a high degree the faculty of being able to enter into conversation with strangers. She paused to talk to a woman, loitering on one of the stoops. We were in search of a couple of nice cheap rooms, she announced.

The woman hunted up the janitor, who showed us a hole into which the light of day scarcely penetrated. Mme. Storey rejected it as being too dear.

"Aah! You won't find nothin' cheaper on t' avenoo," the man said disgustedly. "You better try t' side streets."

We turned into the particular street of the seventies we had in mind. As I have said before, there was only about a hundred yards of it between Pleasant Avenue and the edge of the cliff.

On the south side the flat-house at the corner ran back for a hundred feet; then there was another flat; then several nondescript wooden shanties; and finally the house overhanging the cliff. On the other side of the way, most of the space was taken up by a yard for the storage of wagons at night.

On this side, overlooking the river, was a picturesque, old-fashioned wooden dwelling which was still fairly well kept up.

We went boldly into the house that we were interested in, to ask for rooms. It appeared that there were no vacancies. I looked with a little inward shiver at the partition which cut off the murder flat, wondering what was going on within at that moment.

This flat had two doors opening on the long entrance hall of the house; one just inside the front door, which would lead into their parlor; the other farther back, which would be their usual entrance, and would admit you to their dining room.

On the other side of the road, adjoining the entrance to the wagon yard, there was a little building which had once been a store, but now housed one of the quaint little manufacturies which are to be found everywhere in New York. Horse medicines were put up here.

There were two windows over the store, which attracted Mme. Storey's notice. With a jerk of the head to me, she headed across.

Through the open door of the store came a strong smell of condition powders. A boy was engaged in breaking eggs into a small vat. His expression suggested that the eggs were not very fresh. He was the sole employee.

Mme. Storey beckoned the proprietor to the door. He was a tall, lanky horse doctor; a genuine American type, such as is rare in New York. He looked like an original New Yorker, embittered by finding himself in a city of foreigners.

"What's upstairs, mister?" asked Mme. Storey genially.

"What's that to you?" he answered sourly.

"Well, bein' as t' windas was so dusty like, I t'ought maybe t' rooms was vacant and—"

"They are vacant," he said. "I give up tryin' to rent 'em, because decent folk won't live in such a place, and I don't want no riffraff."

"Riffraff!" cried Mme. Storey, planting her arms akimbo. "*Riffraff!* I'd have you to know, mister, that me and my sister here don't answer to no such description. Poor we may be, but—"

"Aah, keep yer hair on," he said disgustedly. "I wasn't gettin' at you. There's no conveniences. You'd have to come down to the yard for water."

"Well, I could stand that if it was cheap enough," Mme. Storey told him. "Me and me sister, we ain't got no man to provide fer us."

"Any children?" he asked suspiciously.

"Divil a chick!" she said, beaming.

He finally condescended to show us the rooms; and after a spirited bargaining, an agreement was struck at three dollars and fifteen cents per week. The first week's rent was paid over on the spot. The landlord's parting shot as we went out of the door was:

"Mind you, if you've got a passel of brats waitin' round the corner, out you'll go next week! I know you Irish!"

Mme. Storey and I hugged each other, and rocked in silent laughter.

To reach our new quarters you mounted an outside stairway from the wagon yard. It was not a very inviting place; it had

been given up to the dust and the rats for many a month—years, maybe; and it was pervaded by a strong smell of horse liniment.

But that didn't matter so much since we had no intention either of eating or sleeping there. We congratulated ourselves on obtaining so good a point of vantage. We were not immediately opposite the house overhanging the cliff; but everybody who entered or left it, passed under our windows.

From a second-hand store in Pleasant Avenue we purchased, for camouflage, cots, chairs, a table, some pots and pans, and a cook stove.

There was a teamster's family living in a shanty at the back of the wagon yard, and the wife, who could see nothing from her own windows, seemed to spend the time standing at the gate to the yard.

Within an hour, Mme. Storey had struck up a great friendship with her. She proved an invaluable source of information. She missed nothing that went on in our street; moreover, she was the intimate friend of the wife of the janitor across the way.

The particular flat which we were watching had aroused considerable interest in the street, owing to the invariable comeliness of the young men who lodged there.

"They may be wops or hunns or dagoes or whatnot, mum, but they're always pretty fellows," said our informant. "It seems funny."

The housekeeper was known as the French madame. Before the afternoon was out the teamster's wife was able to point her out to us, returning with her purchases from the store.

We saw an enormous shapeless figure swathed in black, moving slowly along under the burden of her fat, looking from side to side with sullen, pained eyes. Her face showed the remnants of a rather remarkable beauty, ruined by fat and evil living. It was a tragic, sinister figure.

Thereafter, during the hours of daylight, one or another of us was always on duty in the rooms over the horse-medicine shop. We cemented our friendship with the wife of the teamster.

That honest woman brewed her own beer

in the shack at the back of the wagon yard. It was a vile decoction; but it was the occasion of friendly little gatherings every morning, which enabled us to meet Mrs. Regan, the wife of the janitor across the street.

Mrs. Regan didn't like the French madame. "Aah! The big fat slob!" said she, blowing the froth off her beer. "I'd like grand to paste her one!"

"What for?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Aah, she ain't just human, like. Not like you and me. Looks at you like you was dirt!"

It reassured us to learn that the French madame had just paid a month's rent in advance. Evidently they had no intention at the moment of giving us the slip.

At this time she only had two lodgers, whom Mrs. Regan described to us as a big dago and a little Frenchy. The dago was a bad egg, she said; once he had kicked her cat clear off the sidewalk just for getting in his way. But Frenchy was a nice little feller. He looked real sorrowful at being in such company.

She could even supply their names. According to her the dago was called Hot-Willy Oh-come-all-ye; and Frenchy, Den-ny the Cash-boy.

When we were alone I asked Mme. Storey what she could make of these extraordinary appellations.

She answered without hesitation: "Attilio Camagli and Denis de Cachebois."

We had no difficulty in identifying our men. They were sent out every afternoon for an aimless walk. These were the neophytes; they were still shabbily dressed. Apparently there was no love lost between them, for they always separated on the doorstep.

The French boy would turn aside and remain staring at the river through the bars of the railing until the Italian had walked off out of sight. This French lad was as pretty as a girl. He was evidently of the northern provinces, with tight blond curls all over his head, and big blue eyes which were at once saddened and secretly terrified. What had those eyes beheld, I wondered. As soon as she saw him, Mme. Storey told me:

"They slipped up when they picked him. He's already cracking under the strain."

The Italian on the other hand was a big, stalwart fellow, black as the knave of spades. He was undeniably good-looking; but with the good looks of a brigand.

His full, red lips were curved in a perpetual sneer; he looked at women through his lowered sooty eyelashes with an expression of insolent triumph.

"Good' Heavens!" said I. "Surely no gently brought up girl would ever fall for him!"

"On the contrary," rejoined Mme. Storey, "if they can give him a slight veneer of good manners, that sort of man is irresistible to a certain type of inexperienced girl."

On the second day after we had installed ourselves in our rooms, we arranged it so that we ran into the French boy on Pleasant Avenue, as he was listlessly drifting home. Mme. Storey addressed him in French.

The effect was electrical; he stopped short, his cheeks colored up, his eyes glistened. He answered her in a perfect torrent of his own tongue.

I do not know the language myself, but Mme. Storey speaks it like a native; and I am continually listening to her. She was not talking good French now, but a sort of jargon. However, he understood it well enough.

It was pathetic to see how the boy's whole nature went out to her. They talked a little while; then suddenly he choked up, and the blue eyes filled. He put his head down, and fairly ran away.

"That kid is worth saving," murmured my mistress.

"How on earth did you account to him for your ability to speak French?" I asked.

"Oh, I told him I was a hospital cook in France during the war," she answered.

"What made him cry?"

"I spoke to him of his own country."

On a subsequent afternoon when I went to the rooms to relieve Mme. Storey, I found little Denis there. I could hear his eager, rapid voice as I went up the outside stair. It still held a suggestion of the reedy tones of boyhood.

He stopped abruptly when I went in. Evidently, from his face, the tears had been falling again.

My presence embarrassed him very much, and he soon left. When the door closed behind him, I looked at my mistress inquiringly.

"Oh, he was very discreet," she said, reaching for a cigarette.

When we were alone in the flat, the contrast between Mme. Storey's absurd make-up and the natural elegance of all her movements, created a very strange effect indeed. She was like some delightful, incredible figure out of a dream.

"The fate of d'Escobar is still fresh in his mind," she went on. "He confined himself to talking about La Belle France."

On the following afternoon I ran into Denis loitering unhappily along the pavement of Pleasant Avenue. He gave me a piteous look, and glanced in terror over his shoulder. Clearly he wished to speak to me, and was afraid to do so.

Close beside me there was a fruit and vegetable display on the sidewalk, and in order to give him a chance, I paused, and affected to look over it.

He drifted up to my side, and likewise scanned the vegetables in the manner of an intending purchaser. Out of the corner of his mouth he murmured in his charming broken English: "Please—not to look at me, miss. Please—to tell your sister I can't come no more. Please—I thank her from my heart for the kindness to a French boy. Please—if we meet on the street do not notice me at all. It is very dangerous."

With that he was gone.

X.

MME. STOREY had seen the janitor's wife enter the wagon yard below, and before knocking off for the day, my mistress went to pay a call at the teamster's shanty to see if anything new was to be picked up. Meanwhile I sat down to my vigil at the window.

We had taken care not to wash the windows, and the accumulated grime offered a very good screen for any one watching from within.

I saw Denis return home from his empty wandering about the streets. He was followed shortly afterward by Camagli, the Italian lad, whose cruel, complacent, half-sleepy expression suggested a gorged cat-animal. He had been up to some private mischief, I could have sworn. This would be about half past three.

Half an hour later I saw coming at a smart pace from the direction of Pleasant Avenue a man I had never seen before, but I instantly guessed that he was connected with our case. Like all the others, he, too, was a handsome fellow, but a few years older than those we had been dealing with, and completely Americanized.

He was foreign born, but his foreign expression was gone. Hat, coat, boots, gloves, all suggested Madison Avenue. He was just such a figure as you may pick out between Forty-Second and Forty-Seventh any day in the year.

He had a grace of feature and of figure that filled me with a helpless rage, because you could see with half an eye that he was perfectly worthless. Physical beauty has us all at such a disadvantage! He had a look of arrogant authority, a trick that is very easily learned—especially if your pockets are well lined.

Young as he was, his face was beginning to be marked by dissipation. One of his black eyebrows was cocked a little higher than the other, which made him look as attractive as the devil, and bad clear through.

He disappeared within the flat house across the way.

I was filled with excitement. Would this be the leader, the directing spirit, the master mind, that Mme. Storey was so keen about laying her hands on? Somehow I doubted it; there was no power in that handsome face. More likely a successful graduate of the academy.

I was in a horrid state of indecision whether to stay at the window or go warn my mistress.

I remained where I was; and it was well that I did so; for almost immediately all three young men issued out of the house together. He with the lifted eyebrow walked in the middle, with Denis and At-

tilio on either hand. The neophytes were regarding the finished product with respect, not to say awe. The three of them set off briskly for Pleasant Avenue.

It was of the highest importance to find out where they were going if I could. Snatching up my things, I slipped down the stairway, and out through the gate of the wagon yard. There was no time to warn Mme. Storey then.

I was close behind my three men, but on the other side of the street. I could not cross over, of course, nor appear to be hurrying unduly. From where I was I brought to bear on them whatever powers of observation my wonderful mistress has succeeded in fostering in me.

The man with the lifted eyebrow was talking animatedly to the two youngsters, but in low tones, for they held their heads close to hear. Since they were of different races, I judged he would be speaking in English; but, alas, there was no chance of my overhearing a word!

He was evidently instructing them; they listened like children. Fortunately for me, he had retained something of the foreign habit of gesticulation.

Pausing for a moment, he leaned over and drew the back of his hand down the seam of his trouser leg, the other two following him with eager attention. Next he threw back the lapels of his coat, and pointed to his waist line. Pausing again, he made Attilio stand back a step, and gazing at him through half-closed eyes, drew his spread hand down through the air, like a painter visualizing a picture. Little Denis he dismissed with a curt gesture.

At the corner they turned down town. I was now half a block behind them, and the people in front of the shops obstructed my view.

To my great disappointment I saw that there was a taxicab waiting below the barrier where the street improvements began. They got into it, and were driven away. There was no other taxi to be had in that part of town. I had to let them go.

When I returned to our rooms I found Mme. Storey there, somewhat surprised at my absence. I described to her exactly what I had seen.

She smiled to herself. She waved aside my regrets at having been prevented from following the young men farther.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "It is obvious where they have gone."

"Where?" I asked like a child.

"He is taking them to the tailors to be measured for their new clothes."

Why, of course!

"Say half an hour to go," she said, computing to herself; "an hour to be measured; another half hour to return. Now, if Mme. la Comtesse will only go out as usual at this hour to do her shopping—"

"There she is," I cried, pointing to where the woman was at that moment turning sidewise, to lower her huge bulk carefully down the steps of the flat house. "But why?"

"I am going over to have a look at that flat," she said.

My heart sank like a stone. "Oh!" I groaned. "Think of the danger!"

She shrugged. "The principal danger is that they take alarm too soon," she replied. "I must chance that. As for myself, well, I have this."

From the battered little bag that she carried as part of her present make-up, she took an automatic pistol and slipped it inside the stuffed out bodice of her dress. The sight of the ugly, black weapon made me feel a little sick.

"How will you get in?" I cried. "Have you got a key?"

She shook her head. "When we were in the hall of that house I took note of the lock on the door. Old-fashioned spring lock. Child's play to open, as many a sneak thief in New York has discovered to his profit. This is the tool he uses."

From the bag again she produced a small rectangular piece of steel, so thin and lissom that it could be bent over until the ends touched.

Now I am no heroine, as those of you who have read these stories must know by this time. Whenever a situation like this arises, my heart simply turns to water, and I would give a million dollars to be safe out of it. At the same time there are certain things that, afraid or not, one is forced to do.

"Well, if you're going, I'm going, too," I said in a very disagreeable voice.

Mme. Storey laughed, and gave me an affectionate glance. "There is no need of it, my Bella; really."

"You will have to examine into everything," I reminded her. "You need me to stand watch in case they return."

"I can trust my ears for that," she said. "There are two entrances to the flat."

"I don't care what you say," I insisted. "I'm coming."

"Very well," she said coolly. "Come ahead."

We stood at the gate of the wagon yard until *madame*, in her snail-like progress, had turned the corner of Pleasant Avenue. Then across the street, and into the flat house. The entrance door was never locked during the day.

My poor heart was beating like a trip-hammer. Some day I shall have heart failure at such a moment, and disgrace myself eternally.

Proceeding down the narrow hall, Mme. Storey rapped on the door which led into the dining room of the flat we meant to enter.

"This is the proper procedure," she whispered to me, grinning. "A sneak thief always knocks first."

I was in no condition to answer her grin. I stood between her and the entrance door in case anybody should enter or leave. I was straining my ears for sounds from the flat opposite. One of our greatest dangers was that the door immediately behind us might be opened at that moment.

The doors of these cheaply-built houses are always ill fitting. That's what the sneak thief counts on.

While I made a shield for her with my body, Mme. Storey inserted her wafer of steel opposite the keyhole of the spring lock, and worked it in, pressing the lock back. In a few seconds we were inside.

She softly closed the door. Shaking like a person in an ague, at first I could see nothing.

"Take heart, Bella," she said cheerfully. "Remember, we have only to run out into the street to be safe."

The extremity of my fear passed, and

I looked around me with a growing curiosity.

I was astonished, I remember, to find the place so orderly. One thinks of abandoned criminals as living in filth and squalor; but this flat, while it contained nothing but the barest necessities, was a model of neatness and cleanliness.

"That's the French of it," remarked Mme. Storey.

There was a table covered with a red and white checked cloth, and half a dozen cheap wooden chairs standing about. Another plain deal table served them for a sideboard. A sewing machine under one of the two windows gave the room a homy touch.

There was also a much worn armchair standing with its back toward the entrance to the bedroom. No pictures; no ornaments of any sort, it was like the eating room in an humble *estaminet*.

We looked into the kitchen at the rear. The same rigorous neatness prevailed there. Nothing of interest to us in that room.

On the other side of the dining room you entered the first bedroom through an archway hung with a pair of shabby chenille portières. This was *madame's* room. To obtain a little privacy, she had hung cotton curtains around her bed in the French manner.

We found nothing in that room. Next came a short hallway connecting the two bedrooms of the flat. The bathroom opened from it. Nothing for us there.

The second bedroom was evidently shared by Denis and Attilio. It had two cots. The moment we entered this room Mme. Storey pointed to a great hook which had been screwed into the top of the window frame outside the sash. No comment was necessary.

On the floor of the wardrobe we found lying a great coil of new rope, and a pulley. Above the rope, among other clothes, hung the elegant gray suit that d'Escobar had worn when he came to tea with Mme. Storey. His hat was there also, and his shoes.

In one of the pockets of the coat within a twist of paper, we found the ring with a turquoise scarab that I had seen upon his

finger; also his gold pencil and his tortoise-shell cigarette case of the latest design.

"How methodical!" commented Mme. Storey grimly.

From a drawer in the bottom of the wardrobe she presently took a sinister little object. It was a circle of steel not much thicker than a heavy wire. The ends were pulled together by a long screw which turned with a handle.

"What is that?" I gasped, though in my heart I knew already.

"One form of a garrote," said Mme. Storey.

Before my mind's eye I could see the devilish instrument slowly drawing around the comely throat of that poor, foolish d'Escobar who had talked too much.

I covered my face with my hands; but that didn't shut out the sight. Mme. Storey put the thing back.

In front of this bedroom was still another room, which would ordinarily serve as the parlor of the flat. But these people had used it as an extra bedroom. It had a window looking on the street.

There were three cots placed about the walls; all neatly covered with spreads, but having no bedding beneath. Obviously this room was not being used at the present time.

As I have mentioned before, it had a door leading into the public hall of the house. This door had a spring lock like the other one, also the common lock that is in every door. The key was in this lock, and it was turned.

This fact afforded me no little comfort, as showing that the occupants could not come in that way, and catch us between two fires.

When Mme. Storey beheld the turned key she smiled to herself. I did not then realize what was passing through her mind.

Our tour of the flat had consumed a good bit of time, and I was getting horribly anxious about the possible return of the occupants. My mistress, absorbed in her patient investigation, was absolutely oblivious to the danger.

I suggested that I had better take up my stand behind the lace curtains at the front window; and she agreed. She went back

into the rear of the flat; and for another space of time I neither saw nor heard anything of her.

Finally I could bear it no longer. I softly called her back.

"Our two hours is about up," I said. "We *must* go!"

She said: "I'm not going, Bella." She pointed to the turned key. "I have a perfect line of retreat. The opportunity is too good to be missed. I desire to overhear their talk."

A sort of despair seized me. It was useless to attempt to argue with her.

"Well, if you must, you must," I said. "I'll have to stay, too."

"There's no need of that," she assured me. "Why, you're terrified at the mere idea."

"I know I am," I said crossly. "But if I had to sit there across the road watching for you to come out that would be worse. I just couldn't stand that."

Mme. Storey being entirely unacquainted with fear, never realizes, I think, what I suffer at such moments.

"Oh, all right," she said cheerfully. "Two watchers are better than one."

In due course I saw the three young men approaching on the sidewalk. As I could see only a few yards along the street, without exposing myself, they were almost at the steps.

"Here they come!" I gasped.

Mme. Storey looked over my shoulder.

"The third man is Raymo Borghini," she said coolly. "One meets him everywhere. He married Mildred Winterson, daughter of the basket-machine millionaire."

XI.

WE remained in the front room, taking care to unlock the door into the hall, and to catch back the spring lock, in case we had to make a quick getaway. The three young men were taking no pains to be quiet, and we could follow all their movements.

They came into the bedroom to hang up their hats and coats. Ah! How my heart beat when one of them came to the very door behind which I stood! They were

talking in English. Clothes was still the subject. I did not hear the voice of Denis.

They then returned to the dining room. Mme. Storey stole through the first bedroom, and the little hall into the second bedroom, and I followed perforce. It was their habit to leave all the doors open except the door into the front room; and this saved us a lot of trouble.

We were now separated from them only by the portières hanging in the archway. Thank God! In the actual moment of danger there is something that comes to your support. I was still afraid; but I had command of my faculties now.

It was growing dark out-of-doors, and they switched on the light in the dining room. We could hear every word they said; and we could even catch glimpses of them as they moved back and forth in front of the narrow interstice between the portières.

There was a pause while matches were struck, and they drew deep at cigarettes. Presently the aroma came wafting through the curtains, and I heard a little sigh of desire escape my mistress. For more than two hours she had been deprived of her gentle stimulus.

We had no difficulty in distinguishing between the various voices. Camagli's was a rumbling bass; Borghini's, the Americanized one, a smooth barytone with a sneer. We already knew the sound of Denis's voice; but he rarely spoke. Camagli said something in Italian, and Borghini quickly caught him up.

"Speak English! You've got to learn to think in English."

"One suit!" grumbled Camagli. "What good one suit!"

"I was only obeying instructions," said Borghini. "The *maestro* wants to see how you look in it before he puts any more money into you. You're dumb, Attilio! My God! With your looks and figure you ought to rise high. You've got everything—except the trifling matter of brains."

"You order t'ree suit for Denis."

"Denis can wear clothes. It comes natural to him."

"Yah! Denis, he scare' of a shadow. He trembla if you frown."

"Well, that's up to the *maestro*. What I'm trying to do is to lick you into shape. Walk across the room and back."

Camagli obeyed, presumably.

"Elbows in; chest out; head up," commanded Borghini. "Rise on the ball of your foot."

"I am doing so," growled Camagli angrily.

"Sure, you are," said Borghini sarcastically, "just as if you were pulled by strings! You've got to keep on doing it, too, until you look as if you were born to it. Denis, show him how a European gentleman walks into the room."

"Show me, you," growled Camagli.

"Oh, I'm an American now," laughed Borghini. "I can do as I damn please. I've landed my fish!"

The crack of light that came between the portières showed me the look of set, cold anger on my mistress's face.

Denis illustrated as he was bid. At that moment Camagli was standing close to the portières with his back to us, and we heard him mutter:

"By God, I'll kill the little — — —!" The epithet was in Italian.

"That won't improve *your* style any," sneered Borghini.

Down the public hall outside we heard approaching an unmistakable, slow *pad, pad, pad*. Mme. Storey and I softly retreated into the front room, closing the last door after us.

We heard the old countess enter the dining room and address the young men complainingly. Her voice was as hoarse as a man's. She then entered her own room. After awhile we heard her go back and join in the conversation. We waited a moment or two, then stole back to our former post of observation.

She had seated herself in the shabby armchair, which, as I have said, was a little to one side and immediately in front of the curtained archway. By peeping sidewise through the crack between the portières I could just see the coil of greasy hair on top of her head which was still as black as a raven's wing; also one shapeless forearm and puffy hand.

She was busy with something that I could

not quite follow. I heard a click as of an opening box; the hand appeared outstretched with a flicking movement; then she sniffed loudly and the box snapped shut. I did not get it until, in dumb play, Mme. Storey illustrated to me the act of taking snuff.

The old woman was sitting there, grumbling away in French. The young men paid no attention to her. The lesson was still going on. Borghini was making Camagli take a cigarette and go through the motions of lighting it over and over. Borghini said:

"As soon as you do it right you can have the Spaniard's tortoise-shell case for your own."

As he said that it happened that Denis was just in line with my vision through the crack, and I saw an involuntary spasm of remembered horror pass over the white face. I shivered, too.

The old woman, angered at being ignored, raised her voice, and Borghini barked at her over his shoulder:

"Aah! You know that Attilio and I can't speak your lingo. If you want to be answered, speak English!"

She did not, however, repeat what she had been saying. She took snuff again.

"Now, come on," said Borghini, in the voice of a snappy college coach. "Make out that the countess is a rich American dame who has asked you to dinner. Come in from the kitchen and pay your respects."

Camagli proceeded to obey. As he crossed the dining room Borghini warned him:

"Mind! No matter how many people there are in the room, you must keep your eyes on her!"

I could only see the end of this performance. That is, where he bent from the waist to kiss the bloated hand that was extended from the easy chair. I was astonished to see how well he did it. He was probably only of peasant stock. He was no more than four feet from me, and for the first time I realized how good-looking he was in his swarthy, insolent fashion. From a purely animal standpoint he was the handsomest of them all. I was appalled to think of the harm he might work.

Borghini was not satisfied.

"Denis, show him how," he said.

If I thought Camagli did it well, when Denis did it I saw the real thing. He kissed that unpleasant-looking paw with a reverential air that was irresistible. He must have had good blood. Certainly his father and his grandfather had been doing that before him.

"You'll never be able to do it like that," said Borghini to Camagli; "but you can keep on trying."

"Ah, well—Denis, he is Franche," rumbled the old woman. "Dere ees no lovairs anywhere lak de Franchmens."

Borghini made a coarse rejoinder which I need not repeat.

"Denis has style," he added, "but he's got no more spirit than an insect."

"Ah, well," said the countess, taking snuff, "dere ees all kin' reech girls, too. When le *maestro* fin' nice, sof', gentle lil girl, it will be Denis's turn."

Camagli was obliged to repeat the hand-kissing performance. Borghini planted himself astride a chair with his arms resting on the back, and exhorted them from the heights of his superior experience.

"You fellows ought to be damned glad to work like hell for a few months. It means a palace on Easy Street for the rest of your lives. After you catch your bird you don't have to keep up this foolishness. You can let yourself go."

"Never forget how lucky you are that the *maestro's* eye fell on you. He does all the real brain work. Nothing is required from you but a little high-class comedy. You can depend on the *maestro*. He's no piker. Nothing less than eight figures attracts him. Eight figures—do you get it? And dollars, at that. I couldn't do the sum in lire or francs. Look at Albert Fleury. He's the lucky dog. Booked for Rody's widow. But there are plenty of others."

"These girls get the bit between their teeth early. They've already got the old man well broke before we come along. So everything is right for us. They get the mon' out of the old man, and we get it out of them—see?"

"I can give you plenty of points how to make your wife fork out. They take this

hand-kissing business seriously; they think we're going to keep it up. Oh, gee—it makes me laugh to think of the surprise that is waiting for them. They don't understand us Europeans; they think we're soft-headed and easy led by the nose like their own men. Whenever you get sick of kissing their hands, remember your time is coming.

"Some of them have got spirit, of course. They'll kick you out. But that's all right. You can make it cost them a hell of a good price to get rid of you; and if there's been no public scandal the *maestro* will put you on to something new.

"All you fellows have got to do is to stick to the *maestro*. He's a great man. Lie back on him; he'll run your show for you. It's hard for a young man to get along nowadays; he'll do your thinking for you. Could you ask more?

"But never, never allow yourselves to think that you can get along without him. His arm can reach right around the world. You saw what he did to d'Escobar last week. And you know what happened to Arpad Rody a few days before that. Rody, the poor fool, was so swollen up with his own importance at having married the Harker billions that he dared to deny his rightful share to the man who had got it all for him. Well—*poof!* Rody got a bullet through the brain, and that was the end of him!"

I suppose a second or two passed before the full significance of what I was hearing registered itself on my consciousness. Then I glanced at my mistress, marveling for the hundredth time at the unerring intuition which guides her. Leaving police, public, and press to mill around and around in a futile circle, unable to decide whether Van Sicklen Harker or Cornelia had shot Arpad Rody, she had struck off alone on the true course.

Borghini continued in the same vein, but furnished us with no further information of first-rate importance. While he talked, and Mme. Storey watched him with a stern, set face, I saw her unconsciously fingering the spot in her bodice under which the pistol lay.

Involuntarily the thought had come into

her mind that was in my own: What a deed of righteousness it would be to shoot down this conscienceless young scoundrel!

Finally Borghini resumed the lesson. He said to Camagli: "Make out that Denis is the girl you have been told to take down to dinner. Bring her to the table. Don't poke your elbow at her like a gawk. Just have your arm ready in case she wants to take it.

"Beside your plate you'll find four or five knives and as many forks, according to the number of courses that are to be served. Leave them lay; that's all you got to do. They're fixed especially for boobs like you. You can't go wrong if you take the outside one each time. The littlest knife is the butter spreader."

At intervals throughout this scene the old woman in front of us had been taking snuff. Each time she helped herself to a pinch she flicked the surplus powder off her thumb nail on the air.

I was so absorbed in the scene that the possible effect on myself never occurred to me until I felt the sneeze coming between my eyes. Oh, Heaven! A sneeze is supposed to be a comic performance, but I assure you that was the most dreadful moment in my whole life. That sneeze came upon me as relentless as doom.

I turned and fled from the portières. Mme. Storey must have thought I was crazy. I got across the first room and through the little hall. In the second bedroom, as I reached for the handle of the door into the parlor, it overtook me. I buried my face in my arm, but the sneeze broke through with a roar. I have never sneezed like that before or since.

In an instant Mme. Storey was at my side. We heard a chair overturn in the dining room and the sound of running feet. We got into the parlor. The door into the public hall was unlocked; but it had not been opened in some time, and it stuck. Oh, the agony of that moment! By the time we got it open Camagli had run through the public hall and we found him facing us. He charged blindly through the door, forcing us both back, and kicked the door shut. At the same moment I was struck over the head from behind.

All the strength ran out of my limbs like water, and I sank to the ground. I was not completely unconscious, for I was aware that somebody had turned on the light. And I could still hear the sounds of the struggle; but no cries, only a strident, furious whispering. I heard one man gasp out:

"Mme. Storey!"

I myself was desperately striving to cry out, but I had no power over my tongue. That nightmare horror of being unable to make a sound is the last thing I remember. Everything turned black.

XII.

I CAME drifting back to consciousness in the same manner that I had drifted away. First I was merely aware of *being*; then I heard a droning sound that resolved itself into a murmur of voices; then I opened my eyes and beheld the light. I found myself sitting in a chair. The first object that resolved itself out of the general haze was the figure of Mme. Storey seated in another chair beside me. Her eyes were fixed upon me big with concern. When they met mine they smiled wonderfully; but she had a handkerchief over her mouth. For a moment my poor, confused wits puzzled over that, then full consciousness returned with a jerk.

It was an awakening to despair; for I perceived that my mistress was tied to the back and to the legs of the chair in which she sat; and the handkerchief was a gag. She had lost the sandy wig and the little black bonnet, and her own shining dark hair had shaken down about her head. Mme. Storey bound and helpless! My world lay in ruins. To be sure, I was in the same condition, but that seemed to be a matter of small moment.

That a life so glorious and valuable as hers should be at the mercy of this scum of humanity was to me an outrage too great to be credited. Yet her eyes were calm and clear; there was even a hint of amusement in them.

I had the dreadful feeling that I was solely responsible for her plight. Had she been alone, she could no doubt have es-

caped; but she would not leave me behind her.

Somewhere in that populous house I heard a door slam. How sharp the pain of the realization that the ordinary life of New York was going on all about us, while we lay there done for! In my agony of mind I groaned under the gag and strained at the ropes that bound me.

Borghini cursed me under his breath. I cared nothing for that. But Mme. Storey warned me with her eyes to be silent, and I obeyed her.

The four members of the gang were sitting around one side of the table, all facing us at a distance of ten or twelve feet. The obese Frenchwoman was planted in her chair like a shapeless sack of flesh. A bottle of cognac and Mme. Storey's pistol lay on the table before her.

The three young men leaned across with their heads close, whispering together, and darting furtive looks of terror at Mme. Storey's proud head. However little Denis may have been disposed toward us and toward them in the beginning, terror had driven him back into their arms. He was one of them now.

It was no satisfaction to me to see that they were terrified of my mistress, even bound and gagged as she was. They had caught more than they bargained for; they were paralyzed by the magnitude of the situation that confronted them; they did not know what to do.

But I knew only too well that a frightened man is more dangerous than an angry one. There lay the loaded pistol on the table; and how easy it is to solve an impossible situation with a bullet! At any moment I expected to see one of the men snatch it up. I gave up hope.

How terrible it was to *see* them discussing our fate, and not to be able to follow the discussion. I knew they must be talking English, for it was the only language common to the four of them. At first all that was plain was that they could not agree.

Borghini argued in vain. He had lost his ascendancy over Camagli. That man's furious brutality now showed forth without disguise. And Denis in the extremity of his

terror seemed to side with him. The woman said little. She was the least afraid of the quartet. She had more than one pull at the bottle, and her drunken eyes fixed themselves on Mme. Storey, stupid with hate.

Finally they began to quarrel, and their voices rose.

"*La garrotte!*" said the old woman in her hoarse, guttural voice. "Denis, bring me *la garrotte!* It ees the only way!"

Denis, however, made no move.

"No, by God!" said Borghini, banging the table. He evidently wished us to hear this. "I've kept clear of murder up to now, and I've no desire to feel an electrode on the back of my neck."

"Yah!" snarled Camagli, threatening him with his fist. "I'll kill you, too! You t'ink you get out of it, eh? You t'ink you leave us to pay!"

Borghini sprang up and away from the man. He was yellow with fright.

"You fool!" he snarled. "If we get to fighting among ourselves, she'll escape."

"*La garrotte!*" repeated the old woman stupidly.

"Oh, for God's sake!" cried Borghini. "She wouldn't have ventured in here without support. She may have twenty men concealed in the street."

The woman shrugged ponderously.

"Then we hang any'ow," she said. "I'll keel her first."

"This is not a question for any of us to decide," cried Borghini.

Bethinking himself of prudence, he went around the table and whispered in the old woman's ear. This time I was able to read his lips. He said: "The *maestro* must know."

"Who's to tell him?" she asked.

"I will. I'll telephone."

Like a cat, Camagli sprang between Borghini and the door.

"*Non! Non! Non!*" he said, showing his teeth like an animal and wagging his uplifted palm back and forth. "If de police is dere, he bring him in to save his own skin. I will go. I am true!"

Borghini affected to shrug. He scribbled what I suppose was a telephone number on a scrap of paper and handed it to Camagli.

Glancing at his wrist watch, Borghini addressed Camagli in Italian; but the old woman pounded the bottle and commanded him to speak English.

"He'll be at home," said Borghini. "At this hour he is dressing for dinner. You had better hang about our steps for a bit, to see if you are watched. Walk up and down the street. Stand in front of our window, and make out you're giving a signal to somebody inside. Then if you're not interfered with, you may know there's nobody on watch. Telephone from the booth in the drug store. Don't give anything away over the telephone. Just tell him we've got the Bird of Paradise and her partner tied up here, and what's to be done with them?"

"When you come back," put in the old woman with a truly hideous smile, "buy a basket wid a covaire, and steal two paving stones. We will need dem to-night."

Camagli fetched his hat and coat and went out. Borghini, biting his fingers in suspense, brushed past me, and went on through to the front of the flat. I supposed that he had gone to watch what became of the other. He remained away.

That left the Frenchwoman and Denis facing us. The woman took a pull at the bottle, and undertook to feed her hatred by taunting my mistress. She spoke in English. I shall not repeat her foul and stupid words. Mme. Storey was perfectly oblivious to them.

Failing to obtain any satisfaction, the old woman fell silent; and thenceforward devoted herself to the bottle. We were all silent, and in that silence a strange little drama acted itself out.

The woman was too drunk by now to perceive what was going on under her nose. I, of course, was always watching my mistress. Being alongside of her, I could not see directly into her face, but I could see that her gaze was fixed unwaveringly on Denis. In Denis's eyes I read her purpose by reflection.

The boy sat in a huddle at the table on the old woman's right, looking even younger than he was; looking like a child sunk in misery. The terror that he had been through had left him mute and apathetic.

For a time he refused to meet Mme. Storey's gaze, though the very turn of his averted head betrayed that he was electrically conscious of it. But at last, by a power stronger than his own will, his miserable, lusterless child's eyes were dragged around to hers.

In his shame he made them look stupid and hard. He quickly lowered them. But they came back to her; they had to come back; and the expression subtly changed. Fear sprang up in them—a wild, panic terror. He looked away quickly; his face worked; he even made as if to get up and leave the room, but dropped back in his chair as if he had been pulled down. He looked at her again—terrified, imploring, helpless. He seemed half out of his wits. Perfect silence in the room, and those eyes crying out: "I cannot do it! Don't ask it of me! I cannot! I cannot! I cannot!"

One held one's breath in the presence of that struggle going on in the boy's soul. Not a muscle of Mme. Storey's face changed. I could just see the side of her full, bright eye fixed so gravely on the boy.

Another change took place in his eyes. The panic died away. A self-forgetful look appeared there that made his eyes beautiful; a look of rapt devotion. The struggle was over. They lifted and clung to my mistress's eyes like a dog's. And as they clung there, the final change appeared. One saw resolution grow in their depths like the starting of a fire. The whole pale face hardened and became manly.

All this happened in a minute or two, of course. Denis jumped up all of a piece and snatched up the gun from in front of the old woman.

Suddenly made aware of her helplessness, a look of drunken terror appeared in the Frenchwoman's slack face. She struggled to her feet, but had not the strength to leave the support of her chair.

"Raymo! Raymo!" she cried hoarsely and breathlessly.

Having got the gun in his hands, Denis for a moment appeared to be at a loss what to do with it. But in the same instant Mme. Storey's hands appeared as if by magic from behind her. While sitting there

before their very eyes she had succeeded in freeing the upper part of her body.

"Give me the gun," she said crisply to Denis in French. "Quick! Fetch a knife to cut my legs free."

She stood up. Thus when Borghini came tumbling through the portières it was to find the blunt barrel of the automatic almost sticking in his face.

He caught his breath on a loud sob and went staggering back against the door into the hall. His eyes were crazed.

"Stand where you are!" said Mme. Storey. And to the woman: "Sit down! If either of you move without permission I will shoot. After what I have heard here I would be glad of the excuse to shoot."

Denis meanwhile had brought a wicked-looking breadknife, with which he proceeded to cut the ropes that bound her legs. Both Borghini and the old woman glared at the lad with inhuman, venomous hatred.

My mistress stepped clear of the chair, stamping her feet to restore the circulation. Mme. Storey was herself again. Her eyes were as bright as stars. As always at moments of deadly tension, a little smile played about her lips. Denis transferred his attentions to me.

"Cut the rope as little as possible," said Mme. Storey. "I have further need of it."

When Denis was done Mme. Storey possessed herself of the knife. The old woman began to vituperate the lad in her slow and heavy fashion. I could not understand a word of it; but it was clear that her wicked tongue was distilling poison, drop by drop.

Denis flinched from it. Mme. Storey glancing sideways at him, made up her mind. When I stood free, she said to Borghini:

"Hold your hands above your head." To me, she added: "Feel of his pockets to see if he has a weapon."

It was an ordeal for me to have to put my hands on him. I kept my face averted. I could feel hatred coming out of him as in waves. But he dared not move. He was not armed.

"Now, Bella," said Mme. Storey, "go to the top drawer of the woman's bureau, and arm yourself with her gun. It is the only one in the house."

I obeyed. The gun was about as much use to me as to a young child; but they did not know that.

Borghini was forced to sit in a chair, where I bound him fast to the back and to the legs, making very sure there could be no slip. While I was so engaged, he whined to Mme. Storey for mercy.

"I was on your side from the start. I leave it to your friend here if I wasn't trying to save you. If it hadn't been for me you'd be dead by now."

Mme. Storey smiled at him in a steely fashion. She helped herself to a cigarette from the mantelpiece, and blew a cloud of smoke with manifest enjoyment.

I gagged the man also; and then by Mme. Storey's orders, Denis and I dragged him chair and all into the kitchen out of sight. We likewise tied the old woman to her chair; but the ropes were hidden under the table. Denis's eyes were continually on the door into the hall, full of dread at the imminent return of Camagli. The poor kid was shaking. Mme. Storey flung an arm around his shoulders.

"Courage, *mon brave!*" said she. "You are my man now. It is impossible that you should fail me!"

The boy lifted his eyes to her with a rapt look, and snatching up her hand pressed it to his lips. There was no art in that gesture.

As for me, strange to say I was not frightened at that moment. I did not feel anything in particular. I was like an automatic woman moving this way and that under the direction of my mistress's flashing glance.

She bade me to sit down exactly as I had been sitting in the first place, with my hands behind me as if they were tied to the back of the chair, and my legs pressed close to the rounds. She said:

"He will not notice in the first instant that the ropes are gone."

She tied a handkerchief loosely over my mouth, and, gagging herself in the same manner, sat down beside me as at first. She, however, kept her right hand out, to cover the woman with the gun.

"If you attempt to warn him, I will shoot," she told the woman.

Finally we heard Camagli's firm tread coming along the hall. Mme. Storey whispered encouragement to Denis in French. At the same time she raised her gun, and sighted along the barrel.

The Frenchwoman closed her eyes as if in sudden faintness. It appeared that that great jellyfish of a woman, knew the meaning of fear, too. Camagli tapped on the door in a particular way, and softly spoke his name.

Denis opened the door, and Camagli stepped in. At first glance, of course, except for the absence of Borghini, the room appeared exactly as he had left it. He spoke without hesitation:

"He come right away. Ten minute. He say put a white cloth on the front window sill if all is safe for him to come in."

Mme. Storey stood up. "Thanks," she drawled. "That was what I wanted."

Camagli spun around on his heel. In him Mme. Storey had very different material from Borghini to deal with, and she knew it.

He was as lightning-quick and as reckless as a wild animal. He sprang at her regardless of the gun. Giving ground a little, she dropped the gun, and whipping out the breadknife, caught him full on the point.

The knife drove clear through his body entering the fleshy hollow between shoulder and breast. I saw the point sticking out under his arm behind.

It stopped him. He whirled around like a tee-totum, his face convulsed in a horrible expression of shock, while he dragged at the handle of the knife. He got it out, and flung it, crimson and dripping, across the room. Then he toppled over sideways with a crash.

A long-drawn groan escaped him. I handed her gun back to my mistress.

She stood looking down at him coldly. She said: "I could not take the risk of rousing the neighborhood with a shot. He is nothing. It is he who is coming that I want. Help me to take him into the kitchen, Bella."

Denis was sent into the front room to display a white cloth on the window sill. In the kitchen Mme. Storey deftly cut away

the wounded man's clothing, and improvised a bandage out of a clean towel, which we scorched on top of the stove in the approved manner.

He was bleeding profusely, but it was not a dangerous wound. Throughout the operation he glared at us with his soulless, animal eyes without even attempting to make a sound.

Close beside us in the narrow room sat Borghini, bound and gagged; and in a state of collapse through sheer funk. We had to work swiftly. It was necessary as a matter of precaution to bind Camagli's uninjured arm behind his back; to tie his ankles together, and to gag him.

When we got back to the dining room, Denis was in a pitiable state. "I cannot face him!" he gasped out. "Not *him*! Ah! His eyes kill one! He is too terrible a man to face!"

Mme. Storey gripped him by the shoulder.

"Denis," she said, "I must have you to open the door for him. The instant the door is opened you may slip out; and go telephone for the police." She wrote down Inspector Rumsey's telephone number. "And Denis," she added kindly. "Do not come back here. I don't want to have to hand you over. Come to my office and wait for me."

"But you? But you?" stammered the boy.

"Oh, we shall be all right," she answered, smiling broadly. "I have taken the measure of his eyes. Bella and I are both armed. And there's no need to avoid giving an alarm once *he's* inside. The greatest danger is that I might not be able to control myself until the police come!"

Turning his back on us, Denis leaned his arms against the wall and buried his face in them, struggling to regain control of himself.

Then we had nothing else to do but wait.

Ah! That is shattering to the stoutest nerves. I began to tremble all over. When I thought of the crimes of this man whom we were waiting for, he swelled up in my imagination like a vast nightmare creature.

I expected to see some foul, unnatural monster step through the door.

Hysteria gripped my throat. I dug my nails into my palms in the effort to keep it down. Mme. Storey lit another cigarette, humming a little tune.

We heard a soft, heavy tread come down the hall, and little Denis turned a ghastly face.

He tapped on the door in the same manner that Camagli had tapped, but did not speak. Denis opened the door and he stepped in. Denis disappeared without my seeing him go.

Mme. Storey and I had drawn back against the portières that the man might not see us too soon. Thus he presented his back to us, a dignified figure, and elegantly dressed.

There was something familiar about that back that struck me all of a heap. Still, I did not recognize him immediately. Mme. Storey did.

"Good evening, Mr. Bleecker," she said musically. "What a charming surprise to find *you* here!"

He turned around.

XIII.

AN hour later, Mme. Storey and I were sitting in Inspector Rumsey's office at police headquarters, our four prisoners safely disposed in cells. Ah! How good it was to find one's self in that ugly, garishly-lighted room, surrounded by muscular blue-coats. Safe! Safe! Safe! I could not get over it.

My mistress in a scarlet evening dress with a sable wrap about her shoulders was recklessly smoking one cigarette after another.

What an amazing contrast between that picture, and the one she had made an hour before in that sordid flat above the East River!

"Well, what are the main lines of your case?" asked the inspector, rubbing his hands together in high satisfaction.

"You have already guessed a good part of it," said Mme. Storey. "Here was Algernon Bleecker, an impoverished man with the most expensive and luxurious tastes,

and no moral sense whatever. His one asset consisted in his social connections which were of the very highest sort. He has acted for years as a sort of steerer in society for the fabulously rich, but that didn't provide scope enough for his talents. He found his opportunity in the general laxity which has developed among the rich since the war. Why, nowadays our wealthy youngsters get married as carelessly as they go to dinner!

"Bleecker, with characteristic acuteness perceived that the foreign nobleman had had his day. The comic strips have made him ridiculous. So he conceived the new idea of importing handsome foreign youngsters. He was perfectly indifferent to their social status so they were good-looking. But they had to be poor and obscure so that he might obtain a complete ascendancy over them.

"He frequented the worst quarters of European cities looking for suitable subjects. When he got them here he had them put through a course of training according to their needs.

"I don't know how long he's been at it. It would be better not to inquire. It worked like a charm. Apparently he has met with no check whatever until the past week or two. The extreme good looks of the young men, their foreign air, their beautiful manners, rendered them highly romantic figures in the eyes of our hothouse girls. If the full truth of Bleecker's operations became known it might create a social revolution. We must suppress it so far as may be.

"I charge Bleecker with the murder of Pedro d'Escobar. His motive was the anger or fear induced by learning that d'Escobar had talked imprudently to me. All the evidence is in your hands. Moreover, Denis de Cachebois, who witnessed the murder, will take the stand for the State.

"It was a remark that I overheard Borghini make to-night that informed me Bleecker had himself killed d'Escobar. I was not surprised; because the first time Bleecker approached me I apprehended that there existed under that smooth, effeminate, luxurious exterior, an insane streak of cruelty. Bleecker *enjoyed* committing those two murders. And how many others I don't know."

"Two murders?" interrupted the inspector.

"Yes. I also charge him with the murder of Arpad Rody."

"What!" cried Inspector Rumsey.

"Ah," said Madame Storey smiling, "you gentlemen of the force have not displayed your usual perspicacity in respect to that case. It was evident to me from the beginning that neither Van Sicklen Harker nor his daughter could have fired the shot that killed Rody. Otherwise the maid must have heard it, not to speak of others in the hotel. It struck me as strange, too, that they all went into the bedroom of the suite for their conference about the money settlement.

"The reason given was that the maid might not overhear; but if you will examine the plan of the suite you will see that there were the same number of doors between sitting room and bedroom as there were between bedroom and bedroom; *i. e.* two. If they didn't want the maid to overhear, why didn't they send her out of the suite altogether? Arpad Rody had some other reason for leading them into the bedroom.

"What reason could he have had? A friend concealed in the bedroom perhaps, to overhear all that passed? Where could such a man have been concealed? In the clothes closet near the head of the bed. As soon as I examined the bedroom, I discovered why no shot had been heard.

"Rody had first been rendered unconscious by a blow on the head; his body then laid on the bed and the gun pressed to his temple, *covered by a pillow*. How did I discover this? The pillow had been tossed back to its usual place at the head of the bed. There were no burns upon the pillow case. The murderer had provided against this by placing something—let us say his handkerchief, between. But several hours after the murder one of the pillows in the room, and only one, was still strongly impregnated with the odor of gunpowder.

"You and everybody else engaged on the case, believed that Van Sicklen Harker was lying when he gave his second version of what had happened; but from this point I preferred to go on the assumption that

he had told the simple truth. What then had happened after Harker had rushed from the suite in a distracted state, after signing the settlement?

"Rody's friend or partner had stepped out of his hiding place; they had quarreled over the division of the spoils; whereupon the unknown man had snatched up Harker's gun, struck Rody over the head with it, and afterward shot him in the manner I have described. He tossed the pistol out of window, and made his escape. The certain finding of the pistol gave him no concern, since he was certain it was Harker's.

"That was as far as I got then. The murderer was unknown to me." But in d'Escobar's unwitting disclosures about the American who picked up likely lads in Europe and brought them over here to get them rich American wives, I got my clew. When d'Escobar was murdered next day I knew that in his murderer I would lay my hands on the murderer of Arpad Rody. And so it happened.

"From Borghini's lips to-night as we were hidden, we heard the proof of it. Bleecker was concealed in that room in order to advise Rody how to proceed in his negotiations with Harker. We will find I believe that Bleecker had engaged a room on the same corridor. Perhaps they had arranged a code of signals while Bleecker was in the closet. At any rate, after he had got the best of Harker, Rody flushed with triumph, thought he could get the best of Bleecker, too. He undertook to turn Bleecker down, and then Bleecker killed him."

The generous inspector shot forth his hand.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "You have never done a more subtle piece of work!"

"Nonsense!" cried Mme. Storey, rising. "I'm glad we got him though! You should have seen his face when he turned around and saw us! That was worth a year's income! And now Bella and I *must* get our dinners! See you to-morrow!"

As we drove uptown I said: "You knew it was Bleecker before he came through the door?"

She admitted it.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"Oh, by a dozen indications, too trifling in themselves to take into court. The murder was written in his eyes. I knew, and he knew that I knew, but he didn't think I could bring it home to him."

Everybody knows the result. Since Denis was ready to testify for the prosecution, Bleecker was first tried for the murder of d'Escobar. If he had by any fluke escaped, the State was ready to proceed with the other case. But he was convicted, and in due course executed.

The countess—who by the way was a genuine countess, a de Courcy—and Attilio Camagli set up the defense that they had acted under duress, and they got off with verdicts of manslaughter. They are serving long terms.

According to Denis's story on the stand, he had no hand in the actual murder. Whether this was true or not I can't say. At any rate the State was satisfied with having him deported to France. I for one was glad of it.

Raymo Borghini was never tried at all. He was not present at the murder; and it was thought better not to bring any charge of conspiracy against him. Shortly afterward his rich wife obtained a French divorce, and he disappeared from the American scene; as did likewise the handsome Albert Fleury, late of the *New York Universe*.

No actual connection was proved to exist between Bleecker and John Jerrold, but the disclosures at the trial ruined Jerrold just the same. He too, left our shores. People speak of meeting him wandering about Paris, a miserable creature.

A complete reconciliation took place between Van Sicklen Harker and Cornelia; and they sailed away together for their delayed tour of the world. I have never seen little Cornelia since; but I do hope that this experience knocked some sense into her pretty head. She has recently, as all the world knows, married an upstanding young American, and they appear to be completely happy.



Pirate Bold

By **FRANCIS LYNDE**

Author of "Empire Builders," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

EDWARD HATFIELD, a writer, charts a schooner yacht to cruise about for rest and recreation. The night before he is to take over the yacht he meets Nan Arnold, whom he had known back in Ohio, and invites her to look over the vessel. As he shows her through the cabin there is a scurrying above-decks, then he and the girl can feel the throb of the engines. They try to rush up on deck, but discover the companion slide is closed. Some hours later they meet a good looking young man who has assumed the name of the captain authorized by the papers to navigate the yacht, the Myra. The young man, who calls himself Captain Potter, tells the shanghaied couple that they will be safe if they will carry out his orders. Hatfield calls him a pirate and is worsted in a fistic tilt. He believes that the dashing young skipper has fascinated Nan, and sullenly keeps to himself about the vessel, accidentally discovering that the Myra's stores indicate a long voyage. As the Myra nears the Bahamas, Captain Potter cracks on more canvas and veers off his course to elude vessels in the regular passenger lanes, then at night changes back to his original course and stands southward. Many times Hatfield has written of such unusual happenings; now he finds himself actually in the midst of them.

CHAPTER VI.

MASKS OFF.

WAITING until the sound of retreating footfalls assured him that Potter and the mate had gone on deck, Hatfield, hoping that a fresh crop of the coveted literary material might be about to ripen, stole out and crept up

the companion steps far enough to enable him to see what was going on.

The scene on deck was sufficiently stirring. All hands had been called to make additional sail, and extra canvas was bursting out on the Myra's slender spars like the miraculous blossoming of a juggler's rose.

With the helm up the schooner's course

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 2.

was shifting sharply to the southeast, and the thumping stamp-and-go of the auxiliary gas engine driven at speed set the trim little vessel a-tremble from stem to stern. On the northwestern horizon a pencil-like beam of electric light was sweeping slowly back and forth, and when its questing eye fell upon the Myra her white sails stood out in ghostly distinctness against the black background of the night.

Cowering out of sight on the companion steps, Hatfield recalled his mental picture of the map of the Bahamas, a map he had often studied assiduously when the urge to write sea stories was upon him. Since the labeling and pigeonholing of such stage properties becomes mere literary routine he had no difficulty in reconstructing the geographical plan.

The Great Bahama, northernmost island of the group, lay east and west, and south of it the broad fairway of Providence Strait led among the banks and keys to Nassau. Inasmuch as the large island had already been left astern, the Myra, on her changed course, must be heading across the strait, and he had disturbing visions of what might happen if Potter, in his efforts to escape, should pile the schooner upon one of the many keys or reefs of the Bahama banks.

From the overheard talk between Potter and the mate Hatfield knew what threatened, or might threaten. Potter, in his proper character, was evidently known to the authorities as a daring and dangerous criminal. Gunnar had said, "All the dicks need to know is that *you* are out after the swag. That'll be enough." True, Potter had replied that the Myra could show a clean bill of health; none the less, it was now plainly apparent that the showing was to be made to serve only as a last resort.

Within a short time Hatfield was assured that the searchlight craft, whatever it might be, had picked up the schooner. The electric eye was no longer sweeping the horizon; it was fixed and its beam was illuminating a broad path from pursuer to pursued. Potter, the mate and the man at the wheel stood out as silhouettes in the light of it, and Hatfield ducked lower in the companionway lest they should see him.

Since they were only a few feet distant

he could hear what was said. Gunnar was sourly pessimistic; the game was up, he prophesied, so far as an escape from an overhauling was concerned. The Fruiter they had sighted in the afternoon had piped them off by wireless. They might as well shorten sail, heave to and have it over with. There was steam behind that searchlight, and sails and gas couldn't win out against steam.

In keeping with his character as a bold buccaneer, Potter only laughed at these croakings of the big mate.

"You're losing your nerve early in the game, mister," he derided. "If the wind holds I'll show that fellow presently; or, if he refuses to be shown, he'll damned well wish he hadn't. You are forgetting that I know this bit of sea as you know the back of your hand."

After a rather exciting chase, during which, in spite of the Myra's engine-assisted flight, the pursuing searchlight eye had drawn perceptibly nearer, Hatfield was given to see a stirring exhibition of the pirate's reckless daring, as well as a complete justification of his laughing boast.

Above the shrilling of the wind in the rigging and the grumbling protest of the over-driven motor came a sound that even a green landsman from Ohio could not mistake; the breaking of the surf upon a beach or reef. There was a cry of "Breakers ahead!" from the lookout at the bow, and at Potter's shouted command the crew of the schooner sprang to their stations at the sheets.

From his lurking place on the companion steps Hatfield's range of vision was strictly limited. But what he saw and heard was thrilling to a degree; Potter shouting a crackling string of orders to the men as he thrust the helmsman aside and took the wheel himself; swift shiftings and reshiftings of the course as the wheel spun to starboard or port under the skipper's hands; and at the crisis a momentary dragging of the schooner's keel in shoal water, followed by a command to ease off and let the vessel run free.

Dazed by the rapid succession of hazards and hairbreadth escapes from them, Hatfield heard Potter saying calmly to Gunnar:

"There you are, mister. Don't you think that'll hold 'em for awhile?"—this, and the mate's grudging rejoinder: "Yeh; and if she'd had a foot less water under her where the hell would we 'a' been?"

The seeker after thrills drew a long breath. At last, at the long last, he was getting some of the things in the raw that he had heretofore to dig up out of an unassisted imagination.

He had been part and parcel of a pulse-quickenning chase at sea and had witnessed an escape that any one of the devil-may-care buccaneers of old might have gloried in making. He craned his neck for a look astern. The menacing searchlight was growing dim in the distance. Potter had guessed right. The skipper of the pursuing craft was not risking his vessel among the reefs and keys.

A few minutes later Gunnar made a move to go back to his sleeping quarters. The Myra was riding free, and her course was once more shifted to the southwest. "If you say we're safely out of it I'll go finish my trick below," Gunnar grumbled after the skipper had relinquished the wheel to the helmsman.

Potter nodded. "Go to it," he agreed shortly; and as the big mate was making to return by way of the cabin Hatfield retreated noiselessly and was behind the partly closed door of his stateroom when Gunnar came through, stopping on his way to pour himself a drink from the decanter in the built-in cabin buffet, and leaving a rich alcoholic trail behind him as he stumbled on into the galley passageway.

Having borrowed so liberally of the night, Hatfield slept late the next morning and was late for breakfast, so late that he ate alone at the cabin table.

Fine weather had come again, with a favorable wind; and the schooner, under full sail, was forging ahead at a pace suggesting the performance of the old-time clipper ships. Going outside to smoke, he found that the man at the wheel was the sole occupant of the afterdeck. A glance into the binnacle showed him that the course had been changed again, this time to a few points south of west; and, once more recalling his mental picture of the maps, he

concluded that the Myra must now be in a strait between Florida and Cuba.

Looking forward he saw Potter and Nan standing together at the rail. Potter was pointing to a hazy outline on the northern horizon which Hatfield took to be the Florida coast, or keys. The chummy attitude of the pair at the rail appeared to confirm the cynical conclusion of the previous day.

Critics of his literary work had often told Hatfield that he couldn't draw women because he didn't know women, and here was the devastating proof of it. He would have backed Nan Arnold to the limit, he told himself, on the score of loyalty and good, hard, sexless common sense—and now look at her! He sat down on the cabin skylight with his back to the irritating exhibition and restuffed his pipe.

It was while he was holding a lighted match in cupped hands over the bowl of the brier that Nan came to sit beside him.

"Feeling all right again, old dear?" she began brightly, and after he had assented in an affirmative that was little more than a grunt: "Captain Potter tells me we missed something by turning in so early last night. Have you heard about it?"

He ignored her question and spoke to the titular matter.

"So it's 'captain' now, is it?" he commented sourly.

"Why not? Isn't he the real captain of this ship? Anyway, what's in a name?"

"There might be a good deal in his name if one could only know what it is. But perhaps you do know?"

She laughed lightly. "Not yet; but by and by, maybe. I'm progressing—a little—I think."

"Evidently," Hatfield agreed, and stopped short with that.

"You've noticed?" she smiled. "But of course you would; it is merely routine with a writing person to notice every little thing, isn't it?"

"I'm not altogether blind, I hope."

"Good egg!" she retorted mockingly. "Now I'll tell you what we missed by going to bed so early. We were chased last night and pretty nearly caught."

Hatfield meanly permitted her to tell the

story of the pursuit and escape, making no sign to let her know that he had been an eyewitness, not even when she finished with: "It's a pity you missed one of the thrills you are so anxious to encounter. Assuming that the captain wasn't gilding the lily for my benefit, you might have made a capital story out of the chase if you could have seen it, don't you think?"

"Did he tell you who was chasing us, and what for?—or haven't you got that far along with him yet?"

She glanced aside at him curiously. After a little pause she said, "No; I haven't got that far along with him—yet."

Hatfield went on sucking at his pipe as one who finds tobacco his one and only solace and tried friend. He was bursting to tell her of his experiences of the night; of the overheard talk between Potter and the mate, of his immurement in the empty forehold and his lucky escape, and of the exciting incidents that had followed. But no. If she were light-minded enough to let herself be carried away by Potter's handsome face and smooth talk—oh, piffle! let it go; let it all go. He guessed he could wrestle things out alone if he had to. And when he should get through, maybe Potter's face wouldn't be quite so attractive.

After an interval of silence which, if transmuted into distance, would have measured a good mile of the Myra's onrush, she tried again.

"That is Florida you are seeing over yonder. Did you know it?"

"Guessed it," was the brief agreement. He knew he was proving himself crabbedly impossible, but he told himself he didn't care. Nevertheless, the mercury in his barometer of discontent dropped still lower when she got up and went to rejoin Potter, who had kept his place at the rail in the waist.

Beyond this, the day passed uneventfully. Smoking endless pipes, Hatfield morosely kept his own side of the deck, whichever that happened to be, made a silent third at the midday meal, and found the latter half of the day as monotonous as the forenoon had been.

From time to time during the daylight hours trails of steamer smoke appeared in

the distance, but the Myra always cannily sheered away from them and at nightfall she had the limitless expanse of ocean visible to herself. It had been the first really torrid day the voyage had afforded, thus far, and Hatfield had found even the light flannels he was wearing burdensome. The tobacco in his pouch was as damp as if it had been sprinkled, and he was trying with a third match to make it burn in his pipe when Potter came to stand beside him.

"A fine evening, Mr. Hatfield," the pirate began genially; and when Hatfield made no reply: "I hope we are still on speaking terms?"

Hatfield put his back to the rail.

"You have done most of the talking heretofore; suppose you go on doing it."

"Thanks; I will. First let me suggest that you are making it unnecessarily disagreeable for yourself. As I intimated on our first day out, it is up to you and Miss Nan to choose whether you will be my guests, or, let us say, my hostages. Miss Nan has very sensibly accepted the situation, and it will be much pleasanter all around if you will do the same."

"We'll leave Miss Arnold out of it, if you please," Hatfield snapped. "She can choose for herself. I don't accept the situation. This schooner belongs to me, for the time being, at least, and I am not your guest."

"Is that a declaration of war?"

"Call it whatever you like. I'll fight for my own hand."

"You did that the other day, and I was under the impression that you got rather the worst of it." The suavity in Potter's tone was gradually petering out.

"You have another impression coming to you," Hatfield countered grimly. "The next time—"

"If there has to be a 'next time' I'll put you to sleep right and proper," was the harsh interruption. "Let me make it plain. You lost out the moment we sailed—from New York. At any time since, if I had given the word, any one of my men, from Gunnar down, would have knocked you on the head and heaved you overboard. Does that clear the air a bit?"

"It might, if I didn't happen to know

that you kidnaped me for a purpose; that you think you are going to find me of more use to you alive than dead!" Hatfield retorted, thus letting the cat out of the bag.

"Ah?" said the pirate; "so you were eavesdropping last night, were you? In that case, we may come to a definite understanding, once for all. You have called me a pirate: you will find that I can be one—precisely the kind of pirate you writing people delight to put in your stories. When the time comes for you to make your appearance on the stage, you will play your part, and do it to the queen's taste; that is, if you care to go on living."

By this time Hatfield was lost to all promptings of prudence.

"You called me a goof last night and told Gunnar you had me down!" he flared. "You try it on whenever you're ready! You probably didn't know it, but you queered your own game the other day when you consented to fight me and knocked me for the count. I don't pretend to know what buccaneering scheme it is you've got up your sleeve, but I'm telling you here and now that I'll spoil it for you, if it's the last thing I ever live to do!"

"All right," was the crisp rejoinder; "we know now where we stand. I thought I convinced you the other day that I'm master on board this vessel, but if you are needing a second lesson, you'll get it."

He was turning away, but faced about to add: "A few minutes ago you told me to leave the lady out of it, and now I'll hand it back to you. I fancy it would give her something of a shock if she should learn that you have it in mind, say, to filch a carving knife from the galley some dark night and stick it into me when I'm not looking. Try it, if you feel like it—but, no; on second thought perhaps you'd better not. If you should, Gunnar would probably tie you to the foremast and flog you to death with a home-made cat-o'-nine-tails. He is just that kind of a pirate, you know."

Hatfield pulled hard at his pipe for a few minutes after he was left alone, fully expecting a reaction that would tumble him down from the militant heights and put the old-time fear of consequences into him.

Oddly enough, however, the reaction failed to materialize. On the contrary, he found himself glowing with an exhilarating sense of triumph. In a way, he had unmasked Potter; made him show his true colors. He wished Nan could have overheard the talk; if she had, perhaps she wouldn't—but, pshaw! what was the use! Women were a law unto themselves. Quite possibly it was the very fact that Potter was an abandoned desperado that made him attractive.

It was striking four bells in the first night watch when he finally went below and turned in, and there had been no new developments save an abrupt change in the course. From sailing due west with a fair wind abeam, the schooner was now beating up to the northward; which must mean that Key West had been passed on the starboard, and that the Myra was now in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. What could be her errand on the unfrequented west coast of lower Florida, if that were where she was heading?

Hatfield speculated upon it for a time and fell asleep at last with the query still hanging unanswered. It was another mystery to be added to the number of those that had gone before.

CHAPTER VII.

POTTER WINS AGAIN.

HATFIELD thought he had been asleep but a few minutes when he was awakened by noises on deck; a shuffling of feet, a creaking of pulley-blocks and a grinding as if the schooner were rubbing her hull against the piles of a pier. Lighting a match he looked at his watch and found that it was well past midnight. Dressing hastily he passed through the darkened cabin and groped his way to the companion steps.

Reaching the head of the short stair he found the slide closed, but with a little maneuvering, in which he found that an attempt had been made to secure the slide, he got it open and stepped out on the after-deck. Though the night was only dimly starlit, he could see that the schooner was

not tied up at a pier; she was lying to in a harbor of some sort. There were dark masses of wooded shore on either hand, though no shore lights were visible.

Alongside the *Myra*, well forward, lay a smaller vessel with a single mast; it was the chafing of the two hulls together that made the grinding sounds. The fore-deck of the *Myra* was lighted by a ship's lantern hanging from the ratlines and it was a scene of brisk activity. A spar hoist had been rigged, and men, a larger number than the crew of the schooner would account for, were transferring some heavy boxes from the smaller vessel to the *Myra's* deck.

More careless of possible consequences than he had thought he ever could be, Hatfield went forward until he stood in the shadow of the dropped foresail. Though he made no special effort to conceal himself, nobody seemed to be aware of his presence. The men at the hoist, with Gunnar growling at them, were busy getting the heavy boxes aboard, and the lantern light was dim.

Potter stood aside talking to a stubble-bearded ruffian who looked as if he might be the chief of a gang of safe blowers. Hatfield caught snatches of the talk, enough to let him know that the burglarish man was one of the confederates who had been shipped by train from New York.

"Naw, we make a clean get-away," the unshaved man was saying. "Nothin' doin' till we hits Fort Myer, day before yesterday. Started to be some trouble about the tools there; long-nosed deppity something-'r-other wanted to know what we had in them boxes. I stood him off, and that night we sneaked the stuff out o' the warehouse and loaded it aboard this tub alongside.

"We crawled down the river before daylight, and I showed the skipper the map you drawed. Been waitin' here since yesterday afternoon, and last night the damn mosquitos like to et us up. Everything all right with you?"

"Everything but time; we're a little short on that," Hatfield heard Potter say. "But the *Matagalpa's* no cup winner. She wasn't due to leave New York until yesterday, and we've got a long lead."

"You're sure the *Weasel's* aboard the *Matagalpa*?" asked the stubble-beard.

"He'd damned well better be."

"How about the owner—lad? Did you grab him off?"

Potter grinned. "You'll see in the morning."

They moved away to the other rail, where the skipper of the fishing sloop was waiting, and Hatfield saw money changing hands; the fishing skipper's hire for bringing off the passengers and freight. He stole a glance at the boxes which the men were preparing to lower into the forehold. They looked as if they might contain arms and ammunition, but there were too few of them to support the gun-running theory; too few and, all but one of them, too small. There was only the one that was large enough to contain army rifles.

The fisherman was going over the rail, and Gunnar and his men were looping the hoist sling around the largest packing case. Hatfield backed away silently, and as he regained the shelter of the cabin companion-way the fishing boat's sail was hoisted and the tublike craft edged away and was soon lost to view in the darkness.

For a time after he had closed the companion slide over his head and retreated to his sleeping quarters Hatfield sat on the edge of his bed in the dark and tried to fit these newer pieces of the puzzle into some understandable pattern.

From what Potter had said in his talk with the mate about "the gang" being on its way by train, Hatfield had looked to see a fighting force of some respectable size taken aboard at whatever rendezvous had been agreed upon. But only four men, including the stubble-bearded leader, had been added to the *Myra's* complement, making no more than a round dozen with the crew of the schooner. How could Potter hope to carry out any piratical scheme demanding force with such a mere handful of men?

When he finally went back to bed and fell asleep, Hatfield slept late. After a breakfast eaten alone because his two tablemates had long since preceded him, he went on deck and found a surprise awaiting him. Once more the *Myra's* course had been changed, radically, this time. With every stitch of canvas that would draw piled on,

she was speeding southeastward, taking in reverse her westing of the previous day.

Hatfield took his stand at the weather rail, and under cover of a leisurely filling of his pipe looked about him to see if there were any new signs of portents. To the outward eye there was nothing different.

As on other fair-weather days the helmsman stool statuelike at the wheel, his gaze fixed now upon the compass in the binnacle and now lifted to mark the drawing of the sails. The other members of the watch on deck were idling in the waist. Up in the bow Potter was sitting on a coil of rope talking with the stubble-bearded man, who now figured, in a natty jack-tar uniform, as a unit in the crew. There was nothing startling; nothing out of the ordinary.

As he was lighting his pipe, Nan appeared at the head of the companionway and tossed him a cheerful "Good morning," with a kiss of her finger to go with it. When she joined him at the weather rail she was laughing silently.

"What's the joke?" he asked, making an effort to restore the *status quo ante* piratical and finding it rather difficult.

"I was just wondering if you've been told. I wasn't, until yesterday."

"What was it Potter told you yesterday? Did he ask you to marry him?"

"No, it hasn't come to that yet; I'm merely living in hopes. What he asked me to do was to pose as Mrs. Eddie Hatfield in case the need should arise; asked me if I'd be equal to it in an emergency."

"And you told him you would?"

She laughed again. "Everything goes, doesn't it, on this fantastic voyage we're making? In the emergency or emergencies referred to we are supposed to be newly married and on our honeymoon, you and I. He wanted to know if I'd agree to play the part of the blushing bride and 'hold it' as the movie directors say. Of course, I jumped at the chance. You see, Eddie, dear, I've never been a bride, even in a play."

"Ump!" Hatfield frowned. "He's got the parts mixed. If he would cast himself as the groom and me as the sailing master the play would stand a lot better chance of getting by."

"That is what I told him," she agreed blandly. "I tried to make him understand that he'd have no end of trouble persuading you to take the star part. Has he tried it yet?"

"He has kindly intimated that he will burn me alive, or something of that sort, if I refuse."

"You have my sympathy," she put in slyly. "Even in a play it would be very dreadful for you to have to pose as the husband of a—er—person you don't care for."

"Who said I didn't care for you?" he demanded.

"It hasn't needed saying by anybody, Eddie, dear," she returned coolly. "No, don't stultify yourself. We have been good pals, and all that, and you've played around with me like a dear boy, but—"

"Well, go on; say the rest of it."

"There isn't any 'rest.' You know it, and I know it. Some day you will marry some nice little mid-Victorian with long hair and adoring eyes who will cook your meals and go about on tiptoe so you won't be disturbed at your writing, a-n-d—"

"How about you?" he broke in morosely.

"You have already disposed of me in your own mind, haven't you?" she inquired sweetly. "Didn't you as good as tell me so yesterday?"

"But, see here, Nan," he argued desperately, "you mustn't throw yourself away on a scoundrel like Potter! Why, he's a—a criminal!"

"Maybe that is why he is so attractive," she suggested dreamily. "You see, Eddie, while I've knocked about a good bit since I've been on my own, I've never before been able to meet an honest-to-goodness, tremendously wicked movie villain, with all the graces and the—er—sheikinesses of the real thing. It's intoxicating."

"It seems to be," he returned grittingly; then he changed the subject by main strength. "Have you any idea where we are heading for now?"

"Only in a general way. Somewhere in the Caribbean, I believe."

Again Hatfield had recourse to his mental picture of the maps.

"Some South American port, perhaps?"

It would look at though we were aiming for the Windward Passage between Cuba and Haiti. Do you know what happened last night?"

She shook her head. "I went to bed early and slept straight through to daylight. What did happen?"

"I think we must have made the west coast of Florida, far down toward Cape Sable. I heard noises a little before one o'clock and got up and came on deck. We were lying to in a harbor of some sort with a fishing boat tied alongside. We took on four more men and some boxes. That is one of the men up forward talking with Potter now; the fellow who needs a shave."

"And then?" she prompted.

"Then the fisherman was paid off and we got under way again."

"You don't know what it all meant?"

"Not any more than you do; perhaps not as much."

"I knew we were to take on some more men somewhere," she admitted.

"Well, we've got 'em, four of 'em, and they are even a tougher looking lot than our wharf rat crew. I overheard a little of the talk—though not very much. We are ready now for whatever it is that Potter is meaning to do, but our time is short. It appears we are racing a ship named the Matagalpa, which was due to leave New York for somewhere or other yesterday or the day before."

"Racing? To where?"

"That I don't know; to some port in the Caribbean, it would seem. Probably Potter will tell you all about it when he gets ready."

"Did they see you when you came on deck last night?"

"No. There was only one lantern, and they were all too busy. Besides, they thought I was fastened in. The companion slide was shut and the hasp was down, but it didn't latch."

"You don't know what was in the boxes that were brought aboard?"

"No; something pretty heavy. They lowered them into the forehold. When I get a chance I'll have another go at that place. I know the way now."

"You've been there? Tell me about it,"

she urged; and he did it, briefing for her the overheard talk between Potter and Gunnar, and enlarging a bit when it came to his investigating adventure.

"How lucky it was that old Uncle Bose had to go in there after something!" she exclaimed. "What would you have done if he hadn't?"

"It would only have been a matter of waiting until morning, and, incidentally, of letting Potter know that I had been prowling around in my own ship. Not that that would have made any difference. We know perfectly well where we stand—Potter and I."

"You mustn't quarrel with him, Eddie."

"For your sake, you mean? You want me to let him get away with the Myra and with whatever other piracy he is planning?"

"I didn't say that. I—"

She did not finish. The man under discussion was coming aft, and a moment later he joined them. After the sharp exchange of the night before, Hatfield expected to find the suave veneer missing, so far as Potter's attitude toward him was concerned. But it wasn't. The pirate made it a party of three at the after rail precisely as if nothing had happened to disturb their relations. To Nan's question he replied that the schooner was in the Nicholas Channel off the coast of Cuba, with the Anguila Islands well astern. With good luck, and the wind holding, they ought to reach Cape Maysi and the Windward Passage before night.

"The Windward is the steamer lane for South American ports, isn't it?" said Hatfield, thinking he could go as far in ignoring the late belligerences as Potter could. At the mention of South America he fancied he saw the handsome eyes narrow suspiciously; but the next moment his question was answered readily and in detail.

"It depends upon the port of departure, the ports of call, and the port of destination," was the preface to the answer. "Ships sailing from New York and bound for the Isthmus or any port as far east as La Guayra pass through the Windward because that is a shorter route than the one around the western extremity of Cuba. Trade for the east coast of South America, of course,

goes outside of the islands altogether. People generally get a distorted idea of relative directions down here. For example, you'd probably say that the Canal Zone is about south of New Orleans. But really it is on the same meridian with the east coast of Florida."

From this the talk slipped easily into the geographical and historical field, and Potter showed that he not only knew his way about in the Spanish Main, but was also well up in the stories and traditions of the buccaneer period.

"Many of the names most famous—or infamous—in their time have been lost or forgotten," he went on when the old-time buccaneers were under discussion. "Morgan and Blackbeard and Tyson we remember, not to mention Captain Kidd, whom, as it now seems, we have been accusing unjustly; but how little we hear of the brutal Brasiliano or the atrociously cruel Lolonais, of John Davis, the Jamaican who became the admiral of the buccaneer fleet, or De Graaf, Mansvelt, Pierre le Grand, Michael le Basque, Alexandre—all leaders at whose call the freebooters would gather by thousands. It is a great pity, Mr. Hatfield, that we are so pressed for time. If we were not, it would be worth much to you in a literary way to visit Tortuga, Trade Wind Cay and the Bay of Samana, all famous rallying places of these old outlaws: But perhaps at some future time if you live—"

Hatfield marked the sinister glance that went with the subjunctive, but was not appalled thereby, as he felt sure he would have been in the Middleville period of his existence.

"I am in pretty good health," he countered evenly. "I was examined for life insurance a few weeks ago, and was told that I have an excellent expectancy."

"Ah, yes," Potter cut in smoothly; "barring accidents, of course. Unhappily, no one of us is immune when it comes to accidents. But, as I was saying"—and the stories of the old buccaneers ran on with no more significant interruptions.

With the *entente cordiale* thus established the day passed without incident. At times during the afternoon the coast of Cuba was in sight; and late in the day Cape Maysi,

the eastern headland of the great island, was weathered to starboard and the Myra pointed her sharp nose to the southward in the broad Windward Passage.

What with the mysteries, the spell of the storied seas and Potter's tales of the old buccaneers, Hatfield could no longer restrain the itching writing finger, and leaving Potter and Nan on deck he went below to lock himself in his stateroom with pencil and paper. Something of the wondrous spell must be caught and fixed while the impressions were clear cut and distinct, and for an hour or more the pencil raced and the creative artist was lost to the world.

It was on the stroke of four bells marking the end of the first dog watch that he heard a sound like the boom of a distant cannon, and shortly after a tap came at the stateroom door. Irritably exasperated at the break in the creative continuity, Hatfield got up and turned the key, his impatience ready to sputter like a shorted wire. At the door opening Potter stepped in.

"Sorry to disturb you," the intruder began urbanely, "but the curtain is about to rise and the audience is calling for the star."

Hatfield scowled. "Cut out the figures and say it in plain English!"

"With pleasure. We are about to be boarded and questioned. Your part in the play is a very simple one. This is your yacht and you and Miss Nan are on your honeymoon voyage. You have the papers to show that everything is straightforward and aboveboard. You have no definite destination; you are merely cruising for the pleasure of it. That is all, excepting that you might stand a bit on your rights as a free-born American citizen and show a little indignation at being held up."

Hatfield thrust out an obstinate jaw.

"I'll see you damned first! I told you I'd smash your game when I got the chance. If you think you're going to make an accomplice of me—" He stopped short with the rest of the defiance sticking in his throat. In a gesture too swift to be visualized, Potter had whipped out a murderous looking knife and was pinning him against the stateroom bulkhead with the point of the weapon at his breast. The handsome face of the pirate had suddenly become a mask of fe-

rocity, and, though he spoke in a half whisper there was a deadly menace in his tone.

"You muddle-headed fool!" he hissed. "I don't want to have to kill you before your time, but if you will have it—choose quick! Will you do as you're told—or—"

"No," said Hatfield; and he never knew how he compassed the courage to say it, with a murderer's knife at his heart.

"Then, listen: you'll die here and now, and I'll take your papers and your part in the play! You've called this a pirate ship, and by Heaven, that's what it is, my bucko—skipper and crew! Say it quickly. There's no time to waste!"

For an instant Hatfield felt his senses going. He tried to tell himself that this was the twentieth century; not the seventeenth; that such things simply couldn't happen. But at this moment, with the menacing knife at his ribs and its sharp point fairly pricking him through his thin shirt, he realized that there are neither times nor seasons in the calendar of crime; also that his chance of getting Nan out of the clutches of this villain was strictly contingent upon his own continuance in the land of the living.

"You win, this time, damn you!" he gritted between set teeth. "I'll go."

With the pirate's hand on his shoulder he was shoved through the open door and along to the foot of the companion steps. "Remember," was Potter's final injunction as they were ascending, "if you don't play up and play straight, there'll be a death in the family—with plenty of witnesses to swear that it was purely accidental. Look up at the main top when we get on deck and you'll see what I mean."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SHEEPISH HERO.

AS they reached the deck Hatfield saw that the schooner was lying to with her head to the wind—and her sails fluttering. Off to starboard, and only a short distance away, lay a high-bowed, sharp-stemmed craft with four overgrown smokestacks; and halfway between the two vessels a power launch, manned by blue-

jackets and with an officer at the tiller ropes, was skimming across to the Myra.

Quickly the pirate, still with a directing hand on his shoulder, shepherded him to the ship's rail, edging him aft when he would have gone to stand beside Nan, who was leaning upon the rail, her gaze fixed upon the approaching launch.

"Look up!" was the command breathed in his ear, and when he obeyed he saw a thing that made his heart skip a beat and his blood run cold. Aloft on the mainmast, with a leg hooked over the spreader, was the thick-bodied mate. He was apparently working with the running rigging, but as Hatfield glanced up, he grinned and held a heavy pulley-block suspended for an instant directly over the head of the unsuspecting young woman beneath his perch.

"You see what will happen," the deadly voice at Hatfield's ear went on. "If you don't play up and keep this navy fellow from messing with us—or if you try to hedge—I raise my hand and there will be a most regrettable accident. Gunnar never misses a throw from aloft. No, you can't warn her—can't get past me without running into this," and again the sharp point of the concealed knife made itself felt.

Half paralyzed with horror, Hatfield saw at once that the devilish ingenuity of the thing rendered him helpless. Conceding that there was only one chance in a hundred that Potter would be fiendish enough to carry out his threat and give the signal which would sign the death warrant of a perfectly innocent and unsuspecting victim, he still did not dare to take that one chance. He felt sure the brutal mate would instantly obey the signal if it were given. If Nan would only look up or step aside—but she did neither, and in a few more seconds the speeding launch had rounded to under the schooner's quarter and the young officer at the tiller ropes was hailing smartly.

"What schooner is that?"

Hatfield stole a fugitive glance at Nan. She had not moved. His tongue was like a stick in his mouth, but he made the answer he was constrained to make.

"The yacht Myra, of New York; Edward Hatfield, owner; John Potter, sailing-master."

"Are you the owner?"

"Yes; under a charter."

"Where are you bound?"

"We are—er—cruising for pleasure; no particular destination," Hatfield stammered. "I—we—"

Potter gave the young officer his blandest smile and took the words out of Hatfield's mouth.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield are on their wedding tour, lieutenant," he broke in deferentially.

The young naval officer smiled up at the attractive young woman steadying herself with a hand on the standing rigging of the mainmast. He was quite evidently convinced that somebody had made a blunder; but orders were orders.

"I shall have to ask to see your papers, Mr. Hatfield. The wireless has been buzzing about your ship, but I guess it's only a mare's nest. If you will pass your license down to me, I won't trouble to come aboard."

Hatfield had the license and his copy of the charter in his pocket. Potter took them and passed them to the bowman who had boathooked the launch to the Myra's rail and they were handed aft. The naval officer merely glanced at the papers and passed them back.

"Somebody's foot must have slipped," he apologized, addressing Hatfield. "There was a story broadcasted that your yacht had been stolen by certain hijackers who have been mixed up in a number of piratical jobs—some newspaper reporter's pipe dream started the story, I suppose. Sorry we held you up. Fine little ship you've got. My compliments to you both, and I hope you'll have all the pleasure in the world. Cast off, bowman!" and with a white geyser boiling under its stern the launch cut a quarter circle and darted away on its return to the halted destroyer.

For a breathless minute or so no move was made on board the schooner. Then Potter snapped out an order and Gunnar swung down from the top and disappeared behind the fluttering mainsail, while the man at the helm spun the wheel to bring the Myra about on her course.

As the schooner fell off before the wind,

Nan crossed to the opposite rail to watch the destroyer get under way, and as she passed him Hatfield saw a look in her eyes that was partly of pity, he thought, but more of half mocking derision. It was as if she had said: "You know your master, don't you?" and it made him furious. When she was across the deck and out of hearing he whirled upon Potter.

"You devil!" he gritted, "you framed me! Throw that knife overboard and I'll—"

"Oh, no; not here and now," returned the pirate coolly. "By and by, if we can spare the time, I'll be glad to give you another chance to prove you are the better man, if you really want it, but we won't stage anything so conspicuous as a scrap while the people on that destroyer can sweep our deck with their glasses."

Hatfield flung away down the companion steps and locked himself in his stateroom, steeped in a fury of bitterness. Potter had not only made him a cringing tool; he had forced him to pose in Nan's eye as a paltry coward, afraid to say the one word which would have brought the questioning naval officer and his bluejackets swarming aboard to take possession of the Myra.

Nan didn't know the peril in which she had stood, and that it was this, and not cowardice, that had kept him tongue-tied. Worse still, she would never know. If he should try to tell her he knew he couldn't make the telling sound like anything but a shifty invention to cover up his own failure. She would refuse to believe that Potter had deliberately planned to make her life a pawn in his desperate game; and now that it was all over, Hatfield himself saw that, after all, it might have been only a shrewd bit of stage play designed to accomplish that which it had accomplished.

Sunk so far in the depths that he could look only with loathing upon the work he had been doing when Potter had broken in upon him, he made no reply to Julie's dinner knock at his door; refused to eat or to show himself again; and after a wretched evening of self-exile went to bed with the bitterness unassuaged.

For now he was beginning to realize, not only that the Myra's mission was something far more desperate than he had

imagined, but also that Nan's good opinion was something he valued more highly than anything else in the world; and that, he told himself in a gust of self-pity, was gone beyond recall.

Waking the next morning with the humiliating taste still in his mouth, he dallied purposely until he was assured that Nan and the pirate had breakfasted and gone on deck. Then, as on two other mornings in the eventful voyage, he sat alone in the otherwise empty cabin saloon, turning over all sorts of vengeful projects in his mind and discarding them one by one when returning reason and common sense told him that, unless a miracle should intervene, one unarmed man couldn't hope to make head against a whole ship's crew.

His hunger satisfied, he was of two minds whether to retreat again to his hermit cell or to go on deck. It was the heat that decided him. With the lessening latitude the temperature was rising and it was beginning to be perspiringly warm and close between-decks. Feeling for his pipe he climbed the companion steps.

Gunnar was at the wheel, and at the big mate's broken-toothed grin Hatfield had return of the blind rage fit and burned his fingers in trying to light his pipe. With the exception of the mate, the after-deck was deserted. As on the previous day, the schooner was making fair weather of it, and her course, as Hatfield judged it from the position of the sun, was about due south, with a steady breeze, which he supposed would be the northeast trade, filling her sails.

Potter and Nan were together up forward—he told himself savagely that they were always together now—and while he made no move to join them, neither did he try to avoid them when they came strolling aft. Coming to sit beside him on the cabin skylight, they both seemed to have reached a tacit agreement to regard the stirring incident of the night before as a thing past and forgotten, and it nettled Hatfield immeasurably to have Potter include him easily in the talk of the favorable weather they were having, and the Myra's excellent performance as a fast sailer and good sea boat, quite as if nothing had oc-

curred. But it was when Nan spoke of his literary work that he came nearest to blowing up.

"We missed you last night and this morning, Eddie," she said, "but I told the captain he needn't be alarmed; that you had probably hit upon a plot for a story, in which 'case you'd neither eat nor sleep until you had worked it out and got it upon paper. Is it a good plot?"

He had to swallow hard once or twice before he could choke down the explosive prompting.

"It has a capital villain," he replied darkly, "but the hero is a good bit of a mutt. I think I shall have to kill him off and try again."

"How about the heroine?" she asked.

"She is a disappointment, too. I am afraid she is going to turn out to be the sort of young woman who is too easily influenced by externals."

"Too bad," she sympathized. "But I suppose you can kill her off, as well."

"If I don't, the villain probably will. He is capable of anything."

Potter laughed. "You might employ him to kill your unsatisfactory hero," he suggested. Then: "If you two will excuse me, I'll go and work out our position on the chart."

After Potter had gone below a silence came and sat between the two who were left behind upon the hatch-covered skylight. Hatfield knew what his companion was thinking about, or he fancied he did, and the prefiguring was verified when she said: "You are quite reconciled to your fate now, are you, Eddie?"

"I don't know what you mean," he objected; but he did know very well.

"I mean yesterday evening," she went on half musingly. A pause, and then: "Was it because you wanted to go on and get all the thrills that may be coming? Or were you just plain afraid?"

Hatfield pulled hard at his pipe. She was giving him a chance to clear himself; to tell her the real reason why he had so meekly fallen in with Potter's plan. But again he saw how utterly incredible his story would sound to her. Would she believe—could he make her believe—that

Potter had sent Gunnar aloft with orders to murder her if the signal were given? Hadn't Potter already won her over, in good part, at least? Nothing short of the evidence of her own senses would suffice to convince her.

"Call it anything you like," he frowned. "I did what I had to do. I—I was unarmed and Potter had a knife."

He could see, or thought he could see, that she was reluctant to believe even this much. Also, he saw that his excuse was a lame one. Granting the presence of the weapon, any attempt upon Potter's part to use it upon his owner would have precipitated instantly the very catastrophe he was scheming to avert. When he glanced aside at her she was laughing silently.

"It is too bad you had to pose as a happy bridegroom, Eddie, dear," she mocked.

"If I had had even a cripple's chance," he began, and broke off abruptly. Again, what was the use? Anything he might say would only make matters worse. Inglorious retreat was the only thing left for him and he got up.

"If you don't mind I think I'll go down and work on my notes awhile. I think I've captured a fresh idea for the plot."

"A new hero?" she inquired, smiling.

"A new twist to his infernal idiocy, at least."

"And the heroine?"

"I'm afraid she will have to be eliminated entirely. It's a mistake to assume that a story can't be built without dragging a woman into it by the hair of her head."

"Well, don't work too hard in this warm weather," she admonished; and the elder-sisterly way in which she said it sent him below in a fresh access of bitterness and gloom.

CHAPTER IX.

HATFIELD DOPES THE PLOT.

TWO days and nights of perfect sailing weather supervened with only a single incident, a momentary stop at Kingston, Jamaica, to vary the monotony. At the stop, which was a mere two-hours'

pause at anchor in the harbor, Potter went ashore in the schooner's dinghy with two of the crew at the oars, coming off a little later with a bundle of newspapers, a couple of small, heavy boxes—which he had his men carry at once to his stateroom—and an artist's paraphernalia of easel, canvases, paints and brushes for Nan.

The dinghy hoisted to its place at the davits and the anchor weighed, the Myra again fled southward, driving hour after hour over the summer sea, her slender spars bending under the load of extra canvas her skipper was continually piling on.

During the two-day interval Hatfield divided time pretty evenly between jotting down sea-stuff impressions for future use and sweating jealously over the growing intimacy between Nan and the pirate; this without intermitting his attempts to fathom the object of the Caribbean flitting.

The fathoming effort yielded small results. So far as might be judged from appearances, the explanation given the officer of the destroyer might have been the true one, barring the honeymoon part of it. To all intents and purposes the Myra was a harmless pleasure yacht loafing southward, and even the hard-looking quartet which had come aboard at the unnamed Florida port of call had melted unobtrusively into the crew and had become indistinguishable therefrom.

In the sentimental field Hatfield found himself calmly elbowed aside. Dating from his passage at arms with Nan on the morning after the hold-up by the destroyer, Potter was with Nan almost constantly. He had invited her to go ashore with him at Kingston, and though she had declined, it was only upon the score of a lack of time for any sight-seeing. And afterward, when she set up the newly acquired easel on deck and made sketches, Potter was always at her side or looking over her shoulder as she worked.

Thus ignored, Hatfield had more time to devote to the mysteries. On the first night out from Kingston he contrived to slip into the forehold through the midship's passage for an examination of the packing cases which had been taken aboard off the Florida coast. Nothing enlightening came of this,

since he had no means of opening the boxes; couldn't have opened them without hammering and making a noise which would have been certain to attract attention. The only thing he determined was that they were heavy—too heavy for him to lift easily.

The next night, however, he had better luck—and more tangible rewards. Toward evening the wind had freshened considerably; and after dinner Potter relieved the helmsman and persuaded Nan to take the wheel, telling her he would now make good his promise to teach her how to handle a ship in a seaway.

Hatfield saw his opportunity for another and more hazardous bit of sleuthing and set about improving it. Not to awaken suspicion by being too precipitate, he took time to finish his pipe before going below. Out of the shadows of the companionway he looked back at the two figures at the schooner's wheel and concluded it was doubtful if either Nan or the pirate had noted his disappearance.

There were no lights in the cabin and he did not snap the switch. Listening for a moment, he crossed to the door of Potter's stateroom and turned the knob. He had expected to find the door locked, and so it was, but the key of his own door served to shoot the bolt. Slipping in quickly he closed the door and struck a match. Almost at once his eye fell upon a thing he had hoped to find; an electric flash light lying in its bracket at the bed's head.

Possessing himself of the flash lamp he made a swift inventory of the contents of the room. On a stand made of the two boxes brought on board at Kingston there was a new wireless receiving set not yet connected up, and on the floor beside it lay the coil of light copper wire which was to serve for the antennæ. This accounted, in part, at last, for the Kingston stop. The Myra was not equipped with wireless, but evidently she was going to be.

Next his attention was drawn to the arms in the room. There was a repeating rifle at the bed's head, and two more bracketed on the paneling within easy reach. In one of the lockers into which he turned the beam of the little spot light there were

a dozen or more new service revolvers, army pattern, all loaded and each with its filled cartridge belt.

It was at this discovery that he did a thing which marked the immense distance he had traveled since he had taken the train in Middleville to answer the New York literary agent's summons. Hoping that its loss among so many wouldn't be observed, he abstracted one of the revolvers and its accompanying cartridge belt, buckling the belt around him and thrusting the big weapon into the holster to leave his hands free.

Hastily continued, the search turned up nothing more of interest or significance save that in a built-in clothes locker he found other rifles; half a dozen of them stacked behind the neatly hung suits of clothing. Taking it as a whole, the small stateroom was a fairly complete arsenal; proof positive that the Myra's errand, whatever it might be, was not expected to be wholly peaceful. On a stand beside the bed lay the bundle of newspapers Potter had brought aboard at Kingston. The searcher thought perhaps there might be something informative in the papers, but decided he dare not take time to examine them.

More than a little disappointed at his failure to find anything more significant than the wireless set and the arms, Hatfield replaced the electric torch and retreated to his own sleeping quarters on the opposite side of the ship. He had fully expected to be able to discover something which would point to the object of the ship-stealing and the subsequent mysterious movements of the Myra, and he was still inclined to the belief that the clew could have been found in Potter's room if he had taken more time to search for it.

At this he began to wonder if his luck would hold long enough to let him try again. It would be a tempting of fate, of course, but weren't the heroes in his stories always tempting fate? Was it honest to make the puppets of his creation take chances that he, their creator, hesitated to take? Manifestly, it was not. True, if Potter should come down and find him rummaging it would mean a fight to the death—if he were given a chance to fight

at all—but what of that? Wasn't a fight *a la outrance* a game that two could play at?

On the other hand, he might never have so good an opportunity again. After a few minutes of heart-beating hesitancy he took a fresh hold upon his courage, cast the encumbering cartridge belt and holster aside, and with the loaded revolver in hand crept through the cabin and part way up the steps of the companion way. By the faint light of the binnacle he could see that Nan was still spinning the wheel to ease the schooner over the rising seas, with Potter coaching her; and a minute later he had again entered the port stateroom and was groping for the electric torch.

Trembling now like any amateur burglar, he snapped the thumb-switch of the torch and played the little ray of light upon his surroundings. There was nothing to be seen that he hadn't seen before; no locker that he hadn't opened. Suddenly it occurred to him to look under the brass bedstead. The space was empty save for a travel-worn sole-leather suit case, and this he dragged out.

The bag was strapped and locked, but it was the work of only a few seconds to unbuckle the straps and to force the lock by standing the bag up edgewise and kneeling with his weight upon it.

A hurried search of the contents at first revealed nothing but a supply of clean linen, shirts, collars and underwear, silk socks and a pair of soft, morocco-leather mules. But in a pocket at the back of the lid he found something which might, or might not, be important. It was a torn half sheet of a newspaper printed in Spanish, with part of the date line—“*Bogotá, Republica de Colombia,*” at the top of the sheet.

With a swift conviction that he had at last found the clew he was searching for, he pocketed the piece of newspaper, hurriedly replaced the scattered contents of the suit case, rebuckled the straps and jammed the lock hasp into place, and was shoving the bag back under the bed, when he heard voices in the cabin and sprang to his feet, extinguishing the flash light as he spun around to face the door. Thereupon followed a period of suspense that was no less

than agonizing. By listening at the door he could recognize the voices. Nan's lesson in ship handling was ended and she and Potter were together in the cabin. He gripped the big revolver nervously and his hand shook as if he had a stroke of palsy. What was going to happen next? There was nothing for it but to wait and see.

Crouching back of the door in momentary expectation of discovery Hatfield persuaded himself that if he should live to be as old as Methuselah he would always be able to recall and shudder at the nerve-racking tension of that waiting interval. Though he could hear the murmur of voices in the adjoining cabin, he could not distinguish the words; could form no idea of what Nan and the pirate were doing or talking about.

For the first few minutes he scarcely dared to breathe for fear of betraying his presence; but farther along the newly found combativeness reasserted itself and steadied him, though the nerve-straining tension remained. With an effort that soon became exquisitely painful he set himself to listen for some stir beyond the closed door which would signal the coming of the crisis. Sooner or later, Nan would go to her stateroom and then Potter would do one of two things: he would return to the deck, or—

Hatfield could feel the perspiration running down his face in rivulets; it got into his eyes and made them smart. Before long he was as wet as if he had been under a shower and every muscle was crying out for action—any kind of action, however desperate, that would serve to relieve the unbearable strain. At last the movement for which he had been listening came. Quite distinctly he heard Potter bidding Nan good night; then he heard Nan's stateroom door open and close. The moment for which all the other agonizing moments had waited had come.

Though it could have been only a few seconds it seemed like an endless age before he heard Potter's footsteps ascending the companion stair and knew he was safe. With the relief from the strain came a reaction that set him shaking like a man with the ague, but he was prudent enough to wait until he was sure the way of retreat

was open. Back in his own cubicle, with the door shut and locked, he turned on his light and, still pretty badly shaken, sat down to examine his find.

Since Spanish had been one of his electives in college he had acquired the usual collegiate smattering of the language and so was able to pick out the meaning of much of the printed matter on the torn newspaper sheet. Among the items was one which fixed his attention immediately. The paper was evidently the organ of the political party in power, and the item in question was an editorial praising the Treasury officials for having been able to obtain, through certain New York bankers, a loan of five million dollars gold for internal improvements, the gold to be shipped to the Bank of the Republic in Bogotá.

Hatfield sat back and gave his imagination full play. Did the mysterious voyage of the Myra have anything to do with this shipment of gold? Was there to be a latter-day revamping of the deeds of the bold buccaneers who sacked ships, cities, churches or government treasuries indifferently?

"By Jove!" he muttered, and again "*By Jove!*" A thoughtful pause and then: "It certainly begins to look that way. We're bloody pirates—there's no doubt about that—and we're racing ahead of a ship that has lately left New York—the Matagalpa. For three days our course has been due south, which will land us somewhere midway between Colon and La Guaya, on the South American coast. By George! I believe I have it at last! *Potter is after that gold, and he is going to use me and my charter of the steamer as a smoke screen to cover the job and the get-away!*"

CHAPTER X.

THE INVENTIVE TRANCE.

SINCE there are few tonics more exhilarating than the triumphant solution of a problem arrived at after much futile puzzling and speculation, it was an altogether different Edward Hatfield who joined his two cabin sharers at breakfast on the morning following Nan's first trick at

the Myra's wheel. In a single night he seemed to have thrown off all of his surliness; and if there was a certain subdued light of battle in his eyes it was tempered by the good-natured grin which was normally the index to his outlook upon life.

"How did your new sailor apprentice make it last evening, Potter?" he asked, after the morning amenities had been exchanged. "Would you trust her to handle the ship in a gale of wind?"

"Sure thing," was the smiling assent. "Miss Nan takes to it like a seasoned A.B. I'm thinking of asking her to share the watches with me."

"Now that I've done it, I don't mind saying that I was scared beautifully most of the time," the apprentice confessed. "I was afraid every minute I'd tip the ship over. Couldn't you see me shaking in my shoes, Eddie?"

"Not in the dark, no. But you needn't camouflage. I never knew you to refuse a dare." Then to Potter: "I see we are still joyously sailing south."

The pirate nodded. "For a few hours longer, yes. We'll raise the South American coast some time this forenoon—barring accidents. Ever been to South America, Mr. Hatfield?"

"Only in my dreams—and in the atlases."

"It is a great continent, needing only a little Anglo-Saxon pep and energy to make it still greater. I suppose you have read up on it, though?"

"Naturally. My job asks for a general smattering of people and places. You may not believe it, but I once wrote a story with Panama and Colombia for a background and it fooled the natives. I have been told that some of them still insist that I must have been down here to get the stuff at first-hand."

"Ah?" said Potter; and Hatfield saw he was beginning to get the rise he was fishing for. "How did you get that information?"

"Soaked it out of books and encyclopædias. Astonishing how much local color you can acquire that way if you only go after it hard enough."

"What particular part of Colombia did you pick for your background?"

"The coast, chiefly. The story I speak of was more than half sea stuff—a gigantic—er—piracy pulled off by a modern Sir Francis Drake, you know."

"Oh, I remember; I read that story in a magazine," the young woman broke in. "I wondered if you hadn't really been down here. I didn't see how, otherwise, you could make it so lifelike."

Hatfield included them both in his happy grin.

"It's very easy when you know how; you dodge the things the books don't tell you about, and put in the things they do. You see, the reader never misses what he hasn't had."

"Why, you unprincipled faker!" Nan laughed. "You ought to be exposed."

"I'm due to be some day; I feel it in my bones. But you mustn't hurry the catastrophe. Let me have my little moment—until the public finds me out."

During this bit of lighthearted give and take Potter seemed to have gone thoughtful. When he spoke again it was to say:

"Ah—just what part of the Colombian coast did you read up on, Mr. Hatfield?"

"Oh, all along it; from Santa Marta to the Panamanian boundary. But I specialized upon the ports, Santa Marta, Puerto Colombia, Cartagena, and a little asphalt port on the Gulf of Morosquillo. At the time I was even up on the chart soundings and all that, but of course I have forgotten most of the details now."

"Do you suppose you would recognize any of these places if you should see them?"

Hatfield laughed. "Don't you think I'd be a pretty poor student if I couldn't? Besides the text in the books there are a good many excellent cuts and photographs, you know."

"I see," said the pirate; but what he saw he did not say.

A little past this Potter finished his breakfast and went on deck. When Hatfield, fumbling for his pipe, would have followed him, Nan said, "Wait a minute," and he sat down again.

"What transforming thing happened to you last night, Eddie?" she began curiously. "It's days and days since you have been so much like your old self."

"A little change of heart, maybe," Hatfield smiled. Then: "Tell me truly, Nan: how much do you really care for this pirate captain of ours? No dodging, please."

"Care for him? Just what do you mean by 'care'?"

"I asked you a short time ago if Potter had proposed to you, and you said 'Not yet.' Does the answer still hold good?"

"No," she replied quite calmly. "He has done it—last night as we sat together here in the cabin for a few minutes after my steering lesson."

And you told him—?"

"I was old-fashioned enough to ask for a little time to think about it. I know such maidenly hesitancy isn't strictly modern; but when one is asked to marry a pirate—"

"Then you are willing to admit that he is actually a pirate?"

"Why, of course! What else would he be?"

"And yet you?" he stopped and began again: "Do you know where I was last night when you two were in the cabin?"

"Abed and asleep, weren't you?"

"Not at all. I was standing behind the closed door in Potter's room with a cocked revolver in my hand."

"Heavens!" she breathed. "What were you doing in there?"

"Waiting for Potter to come in, if that was what he meant to do. Beyond that, I don't know precisely. I believe I had some frantic notion of shooting it out with him and taking possession of my property—if I should survive."

"Heavens!" she said again. "Would you have done that—with Gunnar and eleven or twelve others to fight after their captain was eliminated?"

"I don't know; maybe not. But if he had found me in there, I wouldn't have had much choice, would I? However, he didn't come in; he went on deck and let me escape to my own room."

She fixed him with a steady gaze of the brown eyes.

"What were you doing in his room, Eddie?"

"I was looking for the answer to the puzzle of this voyage. I think I found something that tells me where we are going,

and hints at what we are going to do when we get there."

"Tell me," she commanded.

He briefed the story of the looting of the suit case, adding his guess based upon the item in the scrap of newspaper. She heard him through without interrupting, but when he finished she looked about quickly as if to make sure there were no eavesdroppers.

"You beat me to it, a little, Eddie, dear—but only a little," she confided in low tones. "I found out last night: it is the thing I have been trying to do for days. But we mustn't talk here; we mustn't talk anywhere excepting in some place where he can see us."

Certain things that Hatfield had been wrathfully taking for granted were turning somersaults in his brain; executing demi-volts and right-about-faces that were as intoxicating as they were confusing.

"Then you don't really care for this thief of the world in a—in a marrying way?" he stammered, and as he spoke a shadow blurred the light coming down the open companionway and Potter's feet and legs appeared on the steps.

"Run!" she whispered; and when to the feet and legs were added a body and head, Hatfield was behind the closed door of his stateroom and the young woman was standing before the let-in mirror in the forward bulkhead with her vanity box in action.

Hatfield waited until he was sure the way was clear before going on deck.

It was a hot, tropical morning, but the trade was blowing steadily and the *Myra*, again under full sail, was rushing along over an undulating sea, each wave of which seemed to impart a fresh thrill of life to her trim hull. Potter was lounging at the rail with Nan beside him. Hatfield, leisurely cramming his pipe for the postponed after-breakfast smoke, strolled to the lee rail. A glance aloft showed him that somebody had been busy during the night. Three strands of glistening copper wire were stretched from topmast to topmast, and an insulated "lead" ran down the mainmast and disappeared through a hole bored in the cabin transom. The *Myra* was no longer without wireless.

After a time Nan went below for her

sketching materials. When she returned Potter set the easel up for her and stood aside to watch her as she worked. Hatfield tried to possess his soul in patience. He was eagerly anxious to learn what Potter had told Nan of his purpose; anxious, also, to have his hope that she wasn't sentimentally involved with the handsome scoundrel confirmed. But he had a wholesome fear of what might happen to both of them if the pirate's suspicions should be aroused.

During the waiting interval he had ample time to reproach himself for so crudely misjudging his sometime playmate and school-fellow, if, as she had led him to hope, he had misjudged her. "Muttonhead!" was the epithet he applied to himself. "She knew she could wind that buccaneering beggar around her fingers, and I was too asininely stupid to see what she was doing! And I have sometimes admitted that I have an imagination!"

The chance he was waiting for lingered provokingly, but it came at last when Gunnar appeared with a summons for his chief and the two went forward to confer with the stubble-bearded villain who had come aboard with the mysterious boxes. Even then Hatfield did not hasten; did not move until Nan gave him a cautious signal. When his sauntering approach had brought him across the ship she warned him quickly and without looking up.

"If he comes we must seem to be quarreling," she said, "or, no—better than that, step to the rail and turn your back on me. I can talk while I work," and when he obeyed: "Can you hear me now?"

"Perfectly; we are not talking, you know; you are sketching, and I am looking for the coast of South America," and he suited the action to the word.

"You can make it seem more lifelike if you should go down and get the glass from the cabin," she suggested, and the idea seemed so clever that he went after the glass and put the suggestion into effect.

"That is better," she murmured when he resumed his place at the rail with the glass at his eye. Then: "Beginning where we left off after breakfast. I've told you he asked me to marry him. He made gorgeous promises. I'd never have to paint pictures

any more—not to sell. There would be money—loads of it. We'd travel, go to Europe, around the globe—anywhere we pleased. I might wear diamonds, or emeralds, if I liked them better. When I asked him how all this could be he told me. There is a ship on the way down here with millions in gold for the government of Colombia. He said the gold would never reach Bogotá; that it was all planned."

"Did he tell you the plan?" Hatfield asked. He was still sweeping the southern horizon with the glass.

"Not all of it, but enough. He said the details would have to wait until we had our wireless working. That is what he went ashore at Kingston for—the wireless set. He didn't say so, but I suppose he has a confederate on board the gold ship. The shipment is being kept secret, and, for greater safety, the gold will be taken ashore from the steamer at night. There will probably be other ships in the harbor, ours among them, and he says no one will suspect an American pleasure yacht. That is where we—you and I—come in; just as we did when the destroyer held us up."

Hatfield moved a step aside, still staring through the lenses at an empty horizon.

"What is the port?" he questioned.

"Barranquilla is the city, but it is not directly on the coast. I can't remember the name of the seaport."

"It would be Puerto Colombia," he supplied. "There is a long, steel pier built out to deep water at the mouth of the Magdalena in Sabanilla Bay. Anything more?"

"No."

He was silent for a moment, then: "I wish you hadn't felt obliged to vamp him, Nan."

"I didn't!" was the indignant denial. "He did it all himself. I just didn't try to stop him—that's all!"

"Well, you had me running around in circles, just the same. I guess I've been a bonehead. I ought to have known you couldn't mean it—with Potter; but I didn't. I've been just about broken-hearted, Nan, girl."

"You've looked it," she gurgled. "It was fine. You made it seem as real as

reality. If you hadn't, the 'vamping' as you call it, wouldn't have succeeded. He's no fool, Eddie."

For a moment he forgot his part and turned to her.

"But it *was* real, on my part!" he protested. "I—"

"That's right," she cut in, "keep it up. Everything has got to seem real from this time on, if we don't want to be made to walk the plank."

"But I tell you it was really real," he insisted. "You made it so."

"I had to, Eddie, dear," she murmured, leaning back to get perspective on her sketch. "I—I was afraid you might weaken and spoil it all. That is why I snubbed you and made sneery faces at you. Can't you see?"

"But you thought I was a coward when the destroyer held us up."

"No-o; I just wondered. I know now why you did what you did. He told me last night; to show me how easily he could handle you, he said."

"Told you about Gunnar being in the maintop?"

"Yes. He said if you weren't such a complete Izzy you'd have known it was only a gesture; said that and laughed."

"Right," said Hatfield. "I was almost sure it was a gesture, made for my benefit. But there was one chance in a hundred that it might not be. And I couldn't risk taking that chance."

"Of course you couldn't," she returned calmly. Then, in the same even tone: "I think you'd better go away now; he is coming aft again. Or, wait; perhaps it will look less suspicious if you stay."

With the glass again at his eyes Hatfield held his place at the rail.

"Trying to make land?" inquired the pirate genially as he came up. "We ought to lift the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta before very long—always providing my reckoning isn't at fault. Taking it all in all, we've made a clean run; a most excellent run, don't you think, Mr. Hatfield?"

Hatfield smiled. "You've said it. Thanks to the good weather and your equally good seamanship, the Myra has done all that could be expected of her."

Nan sketched on tranquilly and the talk lagged. After a time a steamer appeared on the far distant horizon and Potter begged the glass of Hatfield.

"A fruiter, homeward bound," he announced, after a long examination. "She has just cleared from Santa Marta. It is a banana port, as I suppose you know,"—this to Hatfield.

"So I have read. Do we put in at Santa Marta?"

"I wish we might—for your sake, and Miss Nan's. Quantities of good literary and artistic material there. The place was founded in the early fifteen-hundreds and is one of the oldest settlements on the Spanish Main. Too bad we have to pass it up."

Again the talk became desultory and at a guarded signal from Nan, Hatfield moved away, crossing to the opposite rail and refilling his pipe. He was not sorry to be dismissed. He wanted a chance to think; time to flog himself around to the new point of view opened up by the events of the morning.

What an ass he had been to imagine that Nan was falling a willing victim to the Potteristic wiles! And how wonderfully brave she had been to take the lead in an attempt to solve the mystery of the theft and southward flight of the *Myra*. Here, indeed, was a mate for a man—if the man could only measure up to the heroic requirements in cold courage and resourcefulness. Five million dollars in gold. Heavens! what a tremendous stake to play for!—loot huge enough to make the old-time buccaneers turn over in their graves!

And the man who could foil the gigantic robbery; who could match wits with the chief robber and his crew of criminals—was Edward Hatfield the man? Could he, with what help Nan might be able to give, hope to defeat a scheme which had evidently been planned and worked out to the minutest detail by a master mind? And if so, how?—that was the burning question.

Suddenly there came an inspiration. If it were in a story, he would find a way out, and triumphantly, at that, for the beleaguered and heroine; he'd blessed well have to, or the story would be a mere flash in the pan.

Knocking the ashes from his pipe, he went below and shut himself in his stateroom prepared to summon the inventive trance. There was no time to lose. If the *Myra* was already off Santa Marta, a mere loafing day's run would bring her easily to Puerto Colombia.

And at Puerto Colombia the curtain would rise upon the climaxing act.

CHAPTER XI.

BACK TO FISTS.

IT was not until after the inventive complex, that indispensable first-aid to the hard-pressed literary craftsman, had been coaxed, commanded and finally bullied during the period of the smoking of many pipes, that Hatfield was forced to acknowledge defeat; to admit that, while it may be foolishly easy to work out a logical plot-ending when all the weaving threads, villainous as well as heroic, are in the weaver's hands, something more than mere literary agility is needful when the villain's itinerary can only be guessed at.

Though he tried in vain to visualize the climaxing scene it was not so difficult to set the stage for it. The gold would most likely be in bullion bars, cased for shipment, and it would be carried in the steamship's strong room. Any attempt to steal it would have to be made after it was debarked.

He recalled the pictures he had seen of the great steel railway pier at Puerto Colombia reaching out nearly a mile into the bay from the low, sandy shore at the principal mouth of the Magdalena. The gold-carrying steamer would be moored beside this pier, and, since more than half of the commerce of the country passed through Puerto Colombia, there would doubtless be other vessels at the same mooring.

This, then, would be the setting: night; an electric-lighted pier with its trucking platforms, cranes and railway tracks; a train standing ready for the short run to Barranquilla, where a second handling of the gold must be made to a river steamboat; native stevedores transferring cargo; the passengers and crew of the lately ar-

rived steamer looking on from the decks. Potter had told Nan that the transshipment of the gold was to be made secretly.

How could this be done under any such conditions as would obtain, as must obtain, on a busy landing pier? Besides, there would surely be an armed guard for the treasure. Would Potter, with the ridiculously small following he could command, be foolish enough to engage in a pitched battle on a well-lighted and well-peopled pier for the possession of the loot?

Reasoning a bit further, Hatfield did a small sum in arithmetic and found that five millions dollars' worth of gold bars would weigh something over nine tons. He couldn't believe it at first and went over the figures half a dozen times to make sure, but the result was always the same—eighteen thousand-odd pounds! That settled it.

Imagination reared like a balky horse at the bare suggestion that such a heavy burden of gold, or anything else, could be captured, juggled and made to disappear untraced aboard the Myra. The thing simply couldn't be done. And yet Potter was driving the schooner headlong to the rendezvous apparently in the serene confidence that it was going to be done, and done successfully.

It was along in the middle of the afternoon, and the distant bulkings of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta had been in sight for several hours, before he contrived to get a word in private with Nan. Hurriedly briefing for her the result—or no result—of his attempts to envisage the robbery, he asked if there had been any new developments.

"Just one. Our wireless is working and our captain of buccaneer's tells me that the ship we are racing is only a few hours behind us.

"Which means that he has at least one confederate on board the gold-carrier, and maybe more. Still, I can't imagine how the thing is to be pulled off. Did he say anything else?"

"Yes; he suggested that I give you a word of advice. It seems you may be needed to pose again as the Myra's owner, as you were when the destroyer stopped

us. I was to tell you not to be foolish when you were given your cue."

"There was a penalty attached?"

"He didn't say. All he said was that it wouldn't be any use for you to try to obstruct things."

"All right; you may tell him you've obeyed orders."

"Meaning that you won't obey them? What are we going to do, Eddie? I have never felt so utterly helpless in all my life!"

He smiled grimly.

"You haven't any the best of me, at that. I've been hammering my brain all day to try to find the answer, but there isn't any. I'm game to try throwing a monkey-wrench into the works if I'm given a ghost of a chance, but the probabilities are that I shan't have a look-in. If I had even the remotest notion of how the thing is to be put over—but I haven't."

"Of course you haven't," she agreed. "Neither have I. But we must do something, Eddie, dear. I—we—well, you know what is going to happen to me if—if—"

"You mean that if the plot succeeds he will run away with you, whether you say yes or no?"

She made a queer little grimace. "Wouldn't you, if you were in his place, and a pirate? And that isn't all, or even the worst. He won't tell me what is to be done with you when we—that is, he and I—sail away on this around the world voyage he is planning."

"You said something there," said Hatfield thoughtfully. "I'll be decidedly *de trop*, won't I? You'd imagine he'd make me walk the plank in the time-honored old buccaneer fashion of getting rid of inconvenient supernumeraries. He wouldn't want me tagging along, messing up his honeymoon; and he wouldn't dare put me ashore where I could raise a hue and cry and set the dogs on him."

"There is only one thing to do," she offered after a reflective moment. "I'm afraid we can't hope to stop the robbery—just the two of us; but maybe, in the thick of it, we can contrive to get off the ship and run away. There will be a wild fight, of course, and in the excitement we might escape, don't you think?"

"You might; and you must—if we tie up at the Puerto Colombia pier. Let's provide for something of that sort, right here and now. Luckily, I've plenty of money; Potter hasn't held me up for that, yet. Wait." The stolen interview had been staged in the main cabin, and he dodged into his stateroom, coming back presently to thrust a roll of bank notes upon her, saying: "There you are. After we tie up at the pier, watch for your chance, make a bolt for it and get aboard the gold steamer. You'll be safe there."

"But you—what will you do?"

"This is going to be such corking good literary material that I'm minded not to miss a single thrill of it, Nancy, dear," he evaded, grinning boyishly. "If worse comes to worst, I have a revolver and a belt of cartridges, you must remember."

"But, *Eddie!* You can't fight a whole pirate crew!"

"You never know what you can do until you try."

"But—but you can't shoot!"

"Who has been lying about me that way?" he demanded, grinning again. "If I can't shoot, the War Department ought to charge me up with the entire lot of cartridges I burned up at the training camp in target practice. They made me do paper work most of the time, but all the same, I managed to grab off my turn at the butts."

The brown eyes were as steady as little candle flames in a windless room when she looked up and said, "If you stay on the *Myra*, *Eddie*, I stay, too; only in that case, I wish you had stolen two pistols instead of one."

Naturally, he argued eloquently against this decision of hers; and the argument fell as flat as a baker's loaf with the yeast left out. There was no use in talking, she insisted; no use at all. If he meant to stick and try to prevent the robbery, he would probably be killed. And what kind of a pal did he think she was to run away to safety, leaving him to fight for his life with a dozen desperate criminals?

"Oh, well," he yielded finally; "if you won't try it alone, I suppose I shall have to bolt with you—if Potter doesn't fix it so neither of us can make a get-away. But

if I do it, I shall lose the finest chance to scoop in a lot of the real story stuff that ever came to—"

"That isn't what you mean at all!" she broke in impatiently. "You are changed—frightfully changed, *Eddie!* You are like a little boy who has just discovered that he can take a whipping without crying over it. I believe you *want* to fight!"

"Next to seeing you safely out of this mess, what I most particularly want is a chance to show this outlaw of the world that he can't make off with a king's ransom, taking my ship along for good measure," he declared soberly. "Maybe it can't be done, but—"

Again, as in the interrupted interview at the breakfast table, footsteps were heard in the companionway, and this time it was Nan who fled, darting into her stateroom and softly closing the door. Hatfield snatched a book at random out of the cabin rack and was disclosed sprawling luxuriously upon one of the cushioned lockers, apparently immersed in a well-thumbed copy of Kipling's *Kim*.

"Ah," said Potter, as he stood framed in the doorway, "I was hoping I might find you awake. Where is Miss Nan?"

"Isn't she on deck?" Hatfield inquired, with a fair imitation of surprise.

"No."

"Possibly she is taking a siesta; it's hot enough to make anybody sleepy. But you say you were hoping to find me awake? Kipling hasn't put me to sleep—at least, not yet."

The pirate sat down on the opposite locker and lighted a cigar.

"Three days ago, when I asked you to play a small part in a certain little comedy of errors, you had to be coerced like an obstinate schoolboy," he began smoothly. "I am wondering if you have come to any better sense of the situation by this time."

"I don't know that I have," was the guarded reply. "Just what is the situation—if you don't mind going a bit into detail?"

"It is sufficiently full of hazard for you, I assure you. Have you spoken to Miss Nan since luncheon?"

"For a few minutes, yes."

"Then she has doubtless told you what

is likely to be required of you in the near future?"

"She has."

"And your answer?"

"I told her she might truthfully report to you that she had obeyed her orders."

"That isn't the answer," said the pirate coolly.

"No; I'll give that to you. You'll have to prove to me, on even terms, that you are the better man before you can use me again as you did three days ago."

"I have done that once. How many times do you have to be knocked out for the count before you will know who is master on board this hooker?"

"I think it will take one more demonstration, at least."

Potter was silent for a moment; then: "You are not only a fool, Hatfield; you are a damned stubborn fool. You don't seem to realize your situation. This isn't a musical comedy, like "Pinafore" or "The Pirates of Penzance"; it is as much the real thing as it would be if you had lived in the other century and found yourself aboard old Blackbeard's Revenge. I'll see you later."

Once again, as at other moments since the Myra had turned her sharp prow southward off the Jersey coast, Hatfield was tempted to pinch himself to make sure he was not dreaming. It was all too fantastically incredible; two full centuries out of date. If it were in the 1700's instead of the 19's, and the Myra were flying the Jolly Roger instead of the owner's burgee, and Potter were a black-browed miscreant with a beard braided in ribbons and looped back over his ears instead of a handsome athlete with all the *savoir faire* of a man of the world, it might seem less like dream stuff. But as it was—

He put the Kipling back in its rack and went on deck. A glance at the declining sun told him that the schooner's course was now only a few points south of west. On the port quarter the Santa Marta range was fading into a formless bulk between sea and sky, and a faintly yellow discoloration of the water overside told of the approach to the mouth of the great river. Shortly, very shortly now, he decided, the

four-thousand-foot Puerto Colombia pier with its lighthouse and signal mast would be sighted. And after that, what?

A moment later, as he stood at the taffrail wishing that Nan might come on deck to gladden her artistic soul with a sight of the sunset glow on the distant Santa Martas, Gunnar's shrill whistle and shout to the watch made him wheel quickly.

Out of the blinding western radiance an island loomed, and while he stared, blinking, the Myra came about, head to wind, and the anchor was let go. Coincident with the roar of the anchor chain the dinghy was lowered, and two sailors climbed the rail to take the oars. Potter strode aft and summoned him.

"We'll go ashore," he announced curtly; adding: "that is, unless you've gotten over your thirst for another manhandling."

"I haven't," Hatfield returned, and he tried to say it nonchalantly.

"All right; the boat is ready."

Hatfield followed the pirate's lead to the waist, over the rail, and into the dinghy. A pull of a few minutes by the two men at the oars beached the small boat on the island; and telling the men to wait, Potter led the way along the white sands until a curving shore line put them out of sight of the boat and the schooner.

"This will do," Potter bit out crisply, stripping to the waist and tossing coat and shirt aside. "There is no woman looking on now, and when I get through with you this time, you'll stand without hitching and do whatever I tell you to."

Hatfield followed the stripping example, but not too swiftly. The old boyhood dread of punishment had returned and was gnawing at him savagely. In these cold-blooded preparations for battle, and with no second or referee to call a halt even if he were being murdered, his new-found belligerence had deserted him. But in its place, though he did not yet realize it, another sort of courage, the despairing fury of the cornered rat, was coming. Quite likely Potter would kill him in the end, but he could at least make the killing job as hard as possible for the killer.

It was not until the pirate's first blow sent him staggering that the cornered-rat

virus got fairly into his blood and made a fighting maniac of him. Clumsily unskillful as opposed to Potter's cool competence, the desperate rage which transcends both fear and reason made him insensible to pain.

With measured regularity Potter's well-directed blows landed, but they were mere beatings upon a thing apparently dead to their effects. Three times the breath-taking body blows stretched Hatfield upon the sands, but, like the fabled Antæus, he seemed only to gather fresh strength and fury from these contacts with Mother Earth.

"Damn you!" rasped the pirate, as the maniac hurled himself again and again into the fray, "have I got to kill you before you'll come to your senses?" He landed a smashing right and left which should have caved Hatfield's ribs in.

But the savage catapultings merely served to kill the maniac's breath. Black in the face from the cutting of his wind, Hatfield rushed again, went into a clinch, clung until he could draw a gasping breath or two, and in the breakaway contrived to pay some small installment upon the huge debt that was accumulating.

Past this unbeatable rage, supplying fresh reserves of berserk fury, the tide of battle was so far turned as to put the cooler man shrewdly upon his defense. At last, unable to break down the pirate's guard, Hatfield forced another clinch, and this was his undoing. Instead of trying to free himself, Potter secured a wrestler's hold and Hatfield went down, with the Potter fingers closing upon his throat.

"Here's where you get yours!" panted the victor, tightening his throttling hold until the evening sky turned blood red for his victim. "Do you come to heel? Or shall I croak you and leave you here for the birds to pick at? Say it quick, or by — I'll choke the life out of you!"

Even so, with his lungs bursting and the sky at which he was staring with eyes half blinded turning from red to black for him, Hatfield would have gone down in mad defiance but for the thought that his death would leave Nan wholly at the mercy of his murderer. Clawing feebly at the throttling fingers he made the sign of surrender—and fainted.

When he came to, the short tropical twilight had fallen and the stars were beginning to show. Potter was dressed and sitting on the sands, waiting.

"Better crawl into your clothes and we'll go back to the schooner," said the pirate, as Hatfield sat up, breathing hard and feeling tenderly of his throat. Then: "You are certainly one fighting fool, Hatfield; I'll say that much for you."

"Thanks," muttered Hatfield, staggering to his feet and going after his shirt and coat. "The next time I'll try and do a little better."

"There isn't going to be any 'next time,' my bucko. You've had your chance twice, and that is enough. You're licked, and you are going to stay licked. If I have to take you in hand again, you'll go overside to feed the fishes. Get a move on. We've lost time enough already."

Hatfield struggled into his clothes and followed his victorious antagonist around the beach to the waiting boat in silence. Potter had spared his face in the slugging, but he felt as though he were a mass of crippling bruises otherwise. Nevertheless, as he had fought desperately for victory, so he now fought quite as desperately to conceal the bruising, or the effect of them.

Setting his teeth, he managed to get into the dinghy without groaning aloud; also, when the schooner was reached, another teeth-gritting enabled him to pull himself over the rail with only inward wincings. Not for all the gold presumably lying in the coming steamship's strong room would he have let Potter see how badly he was crippled.

Happily, Nan was invisible when he climbed aboard; and in the cabin saloon he saw that her stateroom door was shut. Since her room was on the port side, and the Myra, coming into the wind, had laid the island to starboard, he hoped she had not seen the going and coming of the dinghy.

After he had given himself a sponge bath followed by a painful rub-down, he felt better; and the bruising were still further alleviated by the thought that, whatever else had occurred, he had once more stood up to the enemies, psychological and material.

Hence it was with some show of a return

to the normal that he was able to take his place at the cabin dinner table an hour later; to argue amiably with Nan when she raised the question of actual experiences of life versus imagination as the prime qualification for the artist in letters or other media, and even to exchange table amenities with his late strangler.

At the table desertion all three went on deck, and Potter, with a glance into the binnacle and a word to the man at the wheel, disappeared forward. Hatfield filled and lighted his pipe and moved aside out of earshot of the steersman. After a moment or two Nan joined him.

"We were anchored awhile ago; what was that for?" she asked.

Having no notion of telling her the real reason for the halt, Hatfield evaded rather clumsily.

"It was at an island. Potter wanted to go ashore for some purpose. He wasn't gone over half an hour. You didn't see him go?"

"I couldn't see anything. I was locked in my room."

"Locked in?"

"Yes. I had left the key on the outside and somebody turned it. After we were under way again, somebody—the same somebody, I suppose—came along and unlocked the door. I heard the bolt click, but when I looked out, there was nobody in sight. Why was I locked in?"

Again Hatfield evaded. "I've given up trying to account for the things that are made to happen on this ship." Then, wrenching the talk forcibly aside from the latest of the happenings: "Do you know where we are now?"

"Still somewhere near the South American coast, I suppose."

"Very near the mouth of the Magdalena, I am quite sure. The sea began to be discolored with river water a couple of hours ago. If I'm right, we'll make Puerto Colombia some time to-night."

"And then—"

"What will follow I can't say—can't even guess. I haven't the slightest idea as to how Potter will go about his job of piracy. It seems blankly impossible to me, with the small force he can command. Did

I tell you I had figured the weight of the gold? There will be more than nine tons of it."

"Mercy me!" she exclaimed. "Why, Eddie, it would take an army of men to carry it off!"

"Exactly," he agreed. "And you would say it would ask for another army to take it away from the people who will have it in charge. But no doubt all the impossibilities are well taken care of and planned for; otherwise we shouldn't be here."

She was silent for a moment; then: "Oughtn't we to decide now what we are going to do when the Myra lands?"

He shook his head. "It is running in my mind that the decision won't lie with us. Potter will see to that. He is more different kinds of a villain than you could shake a stick at before your arm would ache."

She looked up quickly.

"Has he been showing you the other side of him—the cold-blooded one—again?" she asked.

For the third time he took refuge in equivocation.

"He has told me once more what I'm to expect if I don't obey orders."

"Perhaps it will be safest if you do obey them. You mustn't go and get yourself all killed up, Eddie, dear. I'm scared all the time for fear you'll do something rash. You're—you're so different from what you used to be."

"I hope I am," he returned grimly. "I wasn't much of a man before this voyage began; lived too much in an imaginary world, I guess—making heroes and heroines, and all that. Life in the raw didn't mean anything to me; I only thought it did."

"And women; they haven't meant much to you, either, have they?"

"I have written for men mostly, as you know. The editors tell me I don't know women, and I'll admit it."

"You poor boy!" she laughed. "What a lot you have coming to you!"

"Haven't I?" he said, with an answering laugh that made half a dozen of the bruised muscles protest madly. "If we ever get out of this mess you must take me in hand. If you'll do it up right, I'll put you in a book. I—" He broke off and pointed

to a dot of light on the western horizon. "There is our port. Making a wild guess, I'll say that will be the light on the Puerto Colombia pier. If it is, this is the night for which all the other nights have waited."

CHAPTER XII.

PUERTO COLOMBIA.

ODDLY enough, as Hatfield thought, the Myra's course was not laid directly toward the distant harbor light; on the contrary, the schooner was hauled up until the light bore off the starboard bow. Holding this course until the lighthouse stood about two points off the starboard beam, all hands were called to take in sail, and while the little ship drifted and lost headway she was stripped of every rag of canvas and the auxiliary engine was started.

Under bare poles and with only half-speed power on the engine, the Myra began to make slow headway against an ebbing tide or the current of the great river, or both. In this fashion she crept into the wide bight of the bay, hugging the eastern shore and feeling her way over the shallows with the sounding lead going pretty continuously. Forging ahead thus cautiously, it was a full hour before the anchor was dropped, bringing the schooner up opposite the long pier, but a distance of a mile or more across the bay from it.

During the slow progress to the anchorage Hatfield had kept the deck alone, Nan having gone below after exacting a promise to be called when, or if, there were any further developments. At the dropping of the anchor Hatfield bestirred himself to make his promise good, but the clatter of the chain cable through its hawse pipe had forestalled him, and Nan came to stand beside him at the starboard rail.

"What is it?" she asked in low tones.

"I don't know yet. You see where we are; a long mile from the pier. Hugging the offshore and coming in under bare poles this way, I'd say we are trying to keep out of sight." Then as he made out Potter and Gunnar moving aft together, "Time to be star gazing; Potter and his man Friday are

bearing down on us," and when the pirate and his mate came by, the pair at the quarter rail were commenting enthusiastically upon the glamorous beauty of the tropical night.

The Myra was now swinging to the slack of her cable, and Potter, with the mate at his elbow, was at the stern sweeping the seaward horizon with his binoculars. Hatfield fancied he could scarcely have had the focus adjusted before he said something to Gunnar that sent the big mate forward at a shambling run. Instantly the deck amidships became a scene of brisk activity. Boat falls were quickly rigged and the Myra's lifeboat, a roomy motor launch which had rested undisturbed in its chocks throughout the voyage, was stripped of its canvas housing and put over the side. While the boat's crew was lowering the launch the stubble-bearded man and his mates were hoisting something out of the forehold—an indistinguishable object swathed in a tarpaulin; and this, with its covering still in place, was taken aboard the launch.

Potter, after a prolonged leveling of the glass, had followed Gunnar forward to pass low-toned orders to the men who were tumbling into the launch. Nan laid a hand on Hatfield's arm.

"Look!" she whispered, pointing seaward. "There is a steamer coming in!"

Hatfield nodded. "That is what Potter saw—it's the ship we've been racing—the ship with the gold on board. A pretty close connection, if you ask me. We'll know presently what our part in the play is going to be."

She shuddered. "I'm all quivery inside, Eddie dear. We are not going to be given a chance to interfere or to run away. That is why we are anchored out here."

"That may be one reason, but I suspect Potter has a better one than that for keeping the schooner away from the pier and out of sight. We've been slipping in quietly and under bare poles; canvas all snugged down, as you see."

As he spoke, Potter came up to say briskly: "Sorry to horn in, but you are needed now, Mr. Hatfield. I am sure Miss Nan will excuse you."

Hatfield emptied his pipe over the rail and dropped it into his pocket.

"What do you want of me?" he inquired.

"Your company in the launch, if you please."

Hatfield made no protest. Apart from the futility of objection or resistance, there was possibly something to be gained by being in the thick of things; conceivably there might be some miraculous chance to muddle the piratical plan at the crisis. When he followed Potter over the side he found the launch well filled with men—so many of them that he knew the Myra must be left with no more than an anchor watch aboard.

Potter made room for him in the stern sheets of the boat, and the motor was started. Made to cut a wide quarter circle from the schooner's side, the launch was headed for the distant pier; but when the course was laid the motor was throttled to loafing speed—a pace evidently timed to fit that of the incoming steamship. After something like half the distance to the pier had been traversed in silence, Potter spoke.

"Within the next hour or so, Mr. Hatfield, if you obey orders, you are likely to acquire some literary groundwork that ought to be worth a large sum to a gentleman in your profession," he remarked blandly.

"And what if I don't obey orders?"

The pirate waved a hand overside. "The bay is quite shallow; it is filled and filling with silt washed down by the Magdalena, as you doubtless learned in your book study of this coast. But it will be deep enough to serve the purpose. At a word from me—but I am sure you can imagine what will happen if you are tempted to do anything rash. It will figure as one of those unaccountable disappearances we so often read about in the newspapers."

"I see—a knock on the head and a shove overboard," Hatfield returned, assuming a coolness that he was very far from feeling. "What is it you expect me to do?"

"Nothing just at present. I am taking you along merely as a safeguard in case of an unforeseen emergency arising. Your stage entrance will come somewhat later."

Silence fell again, and Hatfield was free to use his eyes. As the launch drew nearer to the pier he saw that there were several vessels moored beside it, just as he had pre-figured there would be. A berth opposite one of the unloading cranes was empty, and into this space the incoming steamer was edging its way. Landward of this open space he made out the shape of a small, flat-bottomed river steamboat with a barge alongside.

When the launch was within a hundred fathoms or so of the slowly moving liner, Potter gave the helm to Gunnar and went forward.

With a flirt of the tiller the mate sent the boat astern of the steamer and a landing was made at another unoccupied space. At the landing touch, Potter, waiting in the bow, sprang out and climbed nimbly to the pier deck, and as he did so the launch was shoved off to clear the moored shipping and permitted to drift as it would in the slow current setting out from the river mouth.

By this time the lately arrived steamer had been made fast and her cargo ports were open. Hatfield, sitting beside Gunnar in the stern sheets of the launch, could see the passengers leaving the upper decks; saw, also, that the unloading of the cargo was beginning.

The scene on the well-lighted pier was much as his imaginings had pictured it. There was a railroad train backing and filling; trucks making a thunderous rumbling on the plank pier deck as they were trundled about by swarthy jet-black *cargadores*; passengers debarking from the steamer and waiting their chance to board the train; a busy scene far too well peopled for any raiding attack Potter might be contemplating.

Hatfield dismissed the raiding hypothesis at once. If there were nothing else to forbid it, the weight of the loot was sufficient. Nine tons of metal couldn't be snatched up and carried off by a handful of men, nor could any such burden be loaded into the launch.

Under one of the pier electrics he saw Potter standing apart, where, in a short time, he was joined by a small man with a satchel who had slipped out of the pro-

cession of debarking passengers. There was a brief conference, and when it ended the stranger disappeared like a shadow and Potter came to the stringpiece of the pier and signaled for the launch, which immediately put in for him.

With its commander aboard, the *Myra's* boat began a series of maneuvers which for a time completely mystified Hatfield. Gaining an offing beyond the reflection of the pier lights, the motor was stopped and the boat was suffered to drift slowly seaward.

But a short distance from the steamer's berth the engine was started again and the drift was recovered. After this alternate drifting and forging ahead had been repeated a number of times, Hatfield gathered that Potter was killing time until the stage should be set for the next act—whatever that might be.

The time-killing interval was not unduly prolonged. In one of the pauses Hatfield saw the small river steamboat with its barge in tow move slowly out from its mooring to drop noiselessly down on the seaward side of the moored steamship. As the barge came under one of the liner's outboard cargo ports, the port was opened and a hawser was passed out. Dark figures starting up on the barge quickly made the hawser fast, and barge and steamboat swung gently up to the ship's side where they were sheltered and hidden by the tall hull.

By the time a small gang on the steamship, working swiftly and silently, had rigged a tackle and begun lowering a succession of small but apparently weighty boxes into the barge, Hatfield understood pretty clearly what was to be done. The tremendously valuable gold shipment was not to be intrusted to the ordinary means of transportation to the interior; it was to be taken aboard the barge which the small, shallow-draft steamboat would tow over the bar at the river's mouth and up to Barranquilla, where, doubtless, another secret transfer would be made to a government steamboat for the first stage of the river-and-rail journey to the capital. It was perfectly simple and perfectly safe—provided there had been no leak to betray the secret.

How Potter had learned of this plan so

far in advance, Hatfield could only guess. Evidently there had been a traitor or traitors, either in Bogota or New York, or perhaps at both ends of the line. At all events, it was apparent that the plan was known, and Potter's brief conference with the man on the pier proved that a member of the robber gang had come down on the steamer with the gold to bring the details up to the minute. Fate, or treachery, had put all the threads into the pirate's hands.

While the launch stood off and on in the darkness, Hatfield strained his eyes to get a better view of the two vessels at the steamer's port, and their crews. He could only estimate the number of dark figures moving about in the cargo handling, but he thought there couldn't be more than a dozen or fifteen of them, all told. Would the Colombian authorities start the treasure off with only a mere corporal's guard as an escort? Secrecy was the answer to this, also. The fewer the number who knew, the less danger there would be of a betrayal of the secret. Stealth and not force was the principal safeguard.

Thought there seemed to be an endless procession of the small, heavy packing cases to be passed down to the barge, the transfer was made in a comparatively short time; and the instant the last box was stowed, the hawser was cast off and the towboat, with the barge grappled bow and stern alongside, moved off, slowly at first, but more rapidly as it drew away from the steamer's side. Potter, with the launch's tiller under his hand, gave the clumsy double craft a wide berth, and in a few minutes the treasure tow had disappeared in the landward darkness with no lights showing to mark its distance or location.

As if the disappearance of the gold tow had been a preconcerted signal, the crew of the launch sprang into action. Hatfield saw weapons, rifles, revolvers and knives, passed along; saw Gunnar stumble forward to strip the tarpaulin from the machine gun it had been concealing. In a trice the gun was set up in the bow with its container of cartridges mounted and ready. Potter spoke to the man at the throttle of the motor, and the launch quickly gathered headway. Up in the bow Hatfield could see Gunnar

crouching behind the machine gun, his bullet head projecting above his huge torso like a round knot on a misshapen tree trunk.

In a short time Hatfield, tight-muscled now and under a strain that fairly made him ache, felt rather than saw the launch was entering the river mouth. There was broken water on the bar; surges that tossed the boat about like a chip on the billows. The lights of the pier were still visible, but they had become mere twinkling stars in the backward reach.

When the low, jungled banks of the great river began to outline themselves dimly on either hand, Potter called for more speed and Hatfield found himself shrinking lower in his seat. Beyond all question the men on the towboat and barge would be armed, and at the first indication of pursuit they would doubtless open fire on the crowded launch. He felt peculiarly handicapped and helpless—and conspicuous. He was wearing white yachting flannels, and was the only man in the boat so distinguished.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



THE HOPEFUL MOTORIST

I BLITHELY drove our first car home
 With bright and prideful eyes,
 And gayly pictured as I went
 The family's surprise.
 But quite another plan was sketched
 For me by ruthless fate,
 And as I deftly curbed my speed
 There met me at my gate
 A dapper chap who wore a smug
 Constabulary leer,
 And said: "I'm very sorry, but
You can't park here!"

Oh, well, I thought, I'll drive down town
 And phone the folks from there;
 But when I reached my office door
 A cop yelled: "Don't you dare!"
 Of course he meant I mustn't park,
 So off I went again
 Mad for a stopping place; the most
 Disconsolate of men.
 And when a sign "*Park Here!*" I spied,
 In accents loud and clear
 The keeper of the lot cried: "Full!
You can't park here!"

I sold my lovely car forthwith
 And pocketed the loss
 Without a squeal; for, after all,
 What's all this world but dross?
 And I've so lived I know I'll get,
 Whatever host competes,
 A license for a chariot
 To tour the Golden Streets.
 And if (I might) run out of gas,
 St. Peter's such a dear,
 I'm sure he'll never yell at me:
"You can't park here."

Edward W. Barnard.



The Rescue of Happy Towers

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

"THIS here business of wrangling on a dude ranch," remarked Clem Wilkins, "has, as one might say, its ups and downs."

Mr. Wilkins paused, after unburdening his soul of the above statement, to manufacture a cigarette out of a bit of rice paper and a generous portion of bull—the kind that comes in a little cloth bag.

"The ups," he went on, contentedly applying a match to his handiwork, "being better pay and softer work than any cow person ever enjoyed in the good old days when the saloons and the range resembled each other in being open."

Mr. Wilkins heaved a heartfelt sigh for the halcyon times of a departed past.

"I know what the downs are," spoke up one of his audience, Buckskin Boggs by name. Mr. Boggs was a hatchet-faced, saturnine individual of pessimistic tenden-

cies, and his voice was bitter. "The downs is being obliged to listen to more damfool questions every twenty-four hours than the lad that wrote the Book of Knowledge could answer in two years, eight months, and seventeen days."

Mr. Boggs went on speaking, voice elevated to a pitch of artificial politeness, a slightly feverish glare in his somber eyes.

"No, ma'am, they ain't no danger from Injuns hereabouts."

"Yes, ma'am, they is *some* Injuns left on the Reservation, but they're right gentle."

"What, ma'am? Yes, ma'am, you might see a rattler if you look hard enough."

"How's that? Why, yes, ma'am; I reckon he'd bite you if you insisted on it."

"No, ma'am; I never knew personal of any one dying from snake bite."

"Oh yes, ma'am; I reckon so. Folks probably has died thataway."

"Rustlers, ma'am? Why, no, I ain't heard of any lately.

"Yes, ma'am, hanging used to be considered a proper treatment for a lad that got careless with other folks's steers.

"No, ma'am, I never assisted personal at a hanging bee, but my brother Ed knowed a man who claimed he had a cousin that had talked with a feller who worked for a ranch man living in a section where one of them sudden kind of obsequies took place.

"How would rustlers steal cattle? Lord, ma'am, they'd just natchelly help 'emself, casual like. Sometimes they'd blot out a brand—

"What's that, ma'am? Don't I consider branding a cruel practice? Why now, ma'am, that there is a question—"

"Oh, dry up, for the love of Pete!" Curley Foskett interrupted wearily. "Ain't it bad enough to get all that rot fresh, without you peddling it around second hand?"

"Buckskin is right," Clem Wilkins took the floor again. "Being taken for a walking encyclopedia by curious-minded pilgrims from the East is bad, yet I ain't sure but what the mere aspect of some of these yere hen-pilgrims ain't worse. Now take that madam from Boston that was here last month, the one with the smoked glasses and the in-growing disposition. She was—"

"All of 'em ain't so bad," Ran Newell put in. "They's one on the ranch now that gives your eyes a sure-nuff treat."

"I'm leading right up to her. You mean Miss Frances Culver, I'll bet a stack of blue chips!" and Clem Wilkins snorted.

"What if I do?" Mr. Newell demanded with some heat.

"Has that there siren been a-fluttering her shining orbs at you too?" Clem inquired anxiously. "I was hoping we had only one victim." He turned to address his silent audience. "She's a dangerous, designing female; she's a menace in our midst; she's deliberately snared our fellow citizen, Happy Towers, by her fatal wiles, that's what she's done. She's a-trifling with his young affections, vamping of him, leading him on to his rooin. When she goes back East again she'll forget Happy, ex-

cept mebbby to brag a bit about the cow-puncher's scalp that hangs to her belt; but she'll leave poor Happy Towers pining away with a broken heart. Listen—"

Clem broke off, hand uplifted for silence.

From the bunk house came the plaintive plink-plunking of a guitar, accompanying the voice of a singer raised in doleful chant.

"It's Happy a-practicing," Clem declared. "Many's the time I've yodeled that song when a big herd was safe bedded down for the night. I know anyway a hundred and fifty-seven verses to it, and they ain't none of 'em fit for polite society. Whatever do you suppose that poor deloded Happy was a-doing all last night, when he oughta been getting his beauty sleep? He was a-sweating himself pink, revising them verses so as not to shock the pretty little ears of Miss Frances, her having expressed a yearning for to hear real cowboy songs from the lips of a real cowboy. And he was rehearsing of 'em over and over, scared stiff for fear he'd make a slip and warble her the wrong lines. Happy's in a bad way."

"Sh!" one of the punchers hissed inaudibly. "She's a-coming."

The door of a guest cabin had opened, and from it emerged a girl, who now came tripping lightly along the sunbaked path toward the main ranch building.

While Miss Frances Culver was obviously and radiantly beautiful—petite, bobbed as to hair, and a blue in her eyes that rivaled the matchless azure of the cloudless Western sky—yet her beauty was of the sort that suggested careful grooming. Also she failed to fit in her setting, almost to the point of incongruity.

One could hardly expect to find an afternoon gown of daring tint—though severely simple in design—on a cattle ranch, whether of the dude variety or not; nor did her gauzy chiffon stockings and charmingly ridiculous little satin pumps harmonize with her log cabin background and the noticeable lack of polished hardwood floors about the ranch.

Each cowboy took in all details of Miss Culver's equipment and person, though you might have sworn that not one of them once glanced at her. In the art of seeing

without looking the puncher stands supremely alone; he is without a peer.

"Humph!" grunted Clem Wilkins. "High heeled slippers on a cow farm! How she can hobble around in 'em sure beats me. And I bet they cramp her toes something fierce."

Ran Newell rushed to the defense of beauty maligned.

"The heels on her slippers ain't much higher'n those you're displaying," said he, *sotto voce*. "And the way I've heard you complain when a-pulling them number six boots on your seven and a half feet, strikes me you ain't got no call to grouch about that girl's pretty shoes."

Mr. Wilkins had the grace to blush at this counter attack; he was known to be rather vain over the shapeliness of his own pedal extremities, which the bootmaker's art made to appear even smaller than they were.

However he instantly rallied, dismissing the issue with the lofty contempt it richly deserved. For the heels on a puncher's boots are of course strictly utilitarian, their function being to provide a secure grip on the stirrups.

Meanwhile the music had ceased in the bunk house, and Happy presently appeared, guitar under his arm, strolling along with a studied air of nonchalance—in a direction which would intercept the course pursued by Miss Frances Culver. Happy's start of surprise when he first seemed to be aware of the young lady's presence was very well done indeed.

"Why, Happy," she greeted him with a ravishing smile, whereat Clem Wilkins ground his molars in futile wrath. "And you have your guitar too! Are you going to sing me that song you promised?"

The delighted cow-puncher beamed fatuously upon her.

"Why, now, Miss Frances, wasn't it strange I should meet you thisaway? I don't claim to be a warbler, Miss Frances, but if you're sure you can stand it, I'd admire to accommodate." Happy was in the seventh heaven.

"I'd love to hear you." Business of fluttering eyes under silken lashes. An instant later the young lady had slipped a hand

within the arm of her glowing escort—and the interrupted stroll continued, though by common consent the two turned their steps away from the main ranch building instead of toward it.

No one could seriously have quarreled with Miss Culver's taste in selecting Happy Towers for her cavalier. Among the X Y Z wranglers were doubtless other sterling youths, yet hardly the type to make the heart of a fastidious maiden from the East turn dainty flip-flops. In the great open spaces where men are men, it is a sad truth that not all men could serve as satisfactory models for underwear advertisements in the high class magazines.

What we are striving to put across is the fact that Happy Towers was most decidedly there when it came to physical endowment—and the beauty of it all was that Happy was wholly unconscious of this, an unspoiled product of the great range, whose honest gray eyes glanced forth with a naïve, ingenuous twinkle that drew people to him as steel to a magnet; and whose smooth face was perpetually wreathed with a sunny smile of boundless good nature, as if trouble was a word existing solely in the dictionary. It was inevitable that his fellow riders should like him.

Add to these potent qualifications a thatch of curly brown hair surmounted by an expensive Stetson with a band of rattlesnake skin. Silk handkerchief of startling crimson fetchingly knotted about his tanned throat; five feet ten of lithe, straight body which carried not an ounce of superfluous flesh, set off to full advantage by the cow-puncher trappings—chaps, spurs, blue pistol, etc.—and you have a picture of Happy Towers.

Yet Happy was only a dogie wrangler, while Miss Frances Culver was—Well, the X Y Z wranglers did not know exactly who or what she was—save that she was obviously amusing herself by a furious flirtation at the expense of the best liked member in the outfit, who, moreover, was taking the affair as deadly serious.

Clem Wilkins and his fellows silently looked after the disappearing strollers. The mobile features of Mr. Wilkins registered deep concern. Solemnly he shook his head.

"Them sharp little heels ain't punching holes in the clay," he murmured. "They're a-piercing the bleeding heart of poor Happy."

"Whatever does she doll herself up thataway?" Red Connors wanted to know. "A body'd think she'd wear garb similar to the rest of the hen-pilgrims; leastways that's what I'd figure she'd do."

Mr. Wilkins gazed on the speaker commiseratingly.

"I ain't surprised *you* think so, Red," he said frankly, "because when you think mainly you don't think a-tall. Most times you use your head just for a place to hang your hat."

Mr. Connors grew slightly restive.

"Well," he demanded defiantly, "being's you're so doggoned smart, suppose you give the rest of us poor dumb-bells your notions on the subject."

"That's what I'm aiming to do," was the placid reply of Mr. Wilkins. "It's all a part of her scandalous designs on Happy Towers. Most of our lady pilgrims wear duds sold 'em by some slick-haired ribbon clerk back East as the proper thing for a cow farm; and I reckon you'll agree that what the bulk of 'em wear makes 'em look like gosh awful frights."

Mr. Wilkins paused for confirmation; the enthusiasm with which it came was hardly flattering to the pulchritude of the X Y Z's guests.

"This here girl," Clem resumed, "has figured that the best bet is to make herself look like a lily a-blooming in a patch of stink weed. It's the contrast that scores. Mebby some women would look good in cross word puzzle shirts, short-barreled breeches, and big shoes laced up to their knees, but I ain't seen one such yet. And I'm asking you, what chance has that kind of a rig got against silk stockings so thin you can't hardly see 'em, and cute little high heeled slippers, and party dresses?"

"But what's her notion fooling around with Happy?" a cowboy demanded of their self-appointed authority.

"Why, she's one of these girls that ain't content unless they got a man trailing 'em; it gets in the blood, like a taste for purple loco in a cayuse."

"Why pick on Happy?" Red Connors was again thirsting for information. "We got some he-pilgrims on the place. But instead of fussing with them she—"

"Turns her thousand candle power lamps on Happy Towers," Mr. Wilkins interrupted impatiently. "Gosh, Red, you sure are thick-headed—after me taking so much pains in your education. These yere buck-pilgrims may dress like honest-to-Gawd range riders, but they don't fool Miss Frances. She wants the real thing, so she picks out the best looking wrangler in the outfit. And poor old Happy's elected to be the goat."

"It's telling on him," Red Connors contributed. "Happy ain't what he used to be. He ain't showing the same interest in his chow, which is a bad sign."

The cow-punchers, now that their eyes were fully opened to the desperate condition of their unfortunate companion, glanced anxiously from one to another, and then hopefully at Mr. Wilkins.

"This here shameful affair has got to be broke up," Curley Foscett stated positively, "before it's too late."

"How?" Buckskin Boggs inquired, coming briefly and directly to the crux of the matter. From the lugubrious expression on the face of the worthy Mr. Boggs it might have been inferred that he entertained little hope of a practical solution.

"One of us butts in on the play," Red Connors suggested eagerly, "and diverts the attention of the lady from Happy Towers. This here party being case hardened and plumb primed as to the situation, no harm'll be done when Miss Culver leaves him high and dry on her departure." Mr. Connors preened himself like a vain poll parrot. "I don't mind saying," he went on in smug satisfaction, "that I might be induced to undertake the job of separating this here designing female from her deluded victim."

Mr. Clem Wilkins bent a severe glance on Red Connors, which caused the latter to blink nervously.

"And of course," Mr. Wilkins spoke in a tone of elaborate sarcasm, "Miss Frances is going to hop up and down for pure joy at the chance to swap the beaming face of

Happy Towers for your moth-eaten countenance!"

Mr. Connors subsided grumblingly, while Ran Newell added his quota.

"Yeah, and what's Happy doing to this rash party in the meanwhile? My notion of a zero job is trying to segregate him from his trail boss." Mr. Newell tenderly fingered an unmistakable lump on his jaw, adding shamefacedly, "I tried it—two, three nights ago. Me and Happy had words over the matter. It was the first time I ever see that shorthorn mad. But everything's K. O. between us now I got over my claim-jumping ambitions."

"Any other ideas?" Clem patiently inquired of the meeting.

"We might stage an abduction," came the hesitating proposal of a hitherto silent member. "Cart her down to the railroad and warn her not to come back. If Happy ain't too far gone now that'd likely save the poor old cuss."

"And when Frank Manwaring learns how some of his cow hands have treated a cash guest," Mr. Wilkins said witheringly, "them same cow hands will be looking for jobs. You ain't sick of the soft snap you got here, are you?" And that was that.

Clem glanced about the circle as if inviting further efforts from his retainers. Curley Fosskett cleared his throat.

"Mebby this hunch ain't much good," said he modestly, "but here goes. We approach Happy and tell him as how we've learned that the Culver girl ain't what she claims to be; that she's a married woman. That oughta get him over his fool notions."

"You can tell him, not me," Ran Newell hastily ejaculated. "Happy'll bust you one first; then he'll find you're lying, and things'll be worse than ever. That scheme is a hunk of Limburger."

"Why not work it from the other end, then?" Curley insisted, refusing to be downhearted at the chilly reception of his plot. "Tell Miss Culver that Happy's the married party. That he used to beat up his wife regular and finally deserted her and his poor little chee-ild. Lay it on thick. Say that Happy's six months behind in payments the court ordered him to make

her, and that a sheriff and four deputies are looking for him. How about that?" and Mr. Fosskett smiled pridefully.

"Now that ain't so bad," Red Connors generously applauded. "That's something like! It—" Mr. Connors here skipped an explosion or two and stuttered along on one cylinder as he caught disapproval writ large on the features of the X Y Z's oracle. "What I mean is Curley's scheme is the best yet," he concluded lamely.

"It might be the best one yet, and still not worth a damn," said Clem Wilkins coldly.

"What's the matter with it?" Curley asked.

"If you'd made a profound study of the female sex like I have," Mr. Wilkins stated, "you'd be aware of the important fact that to inform Miss Culver regarding all these mythical details of Happy's dark past would be to double his danger. This here type of female makes a specialty of wedded husbands. If she once suspected that Happy Towers had a wife and little chee-ild living, she'd cling to him like a leech, draining of his heart's blood—and at the end poor Happy'd be left flatter'n a kid's busted balloon."

Curley Fosskett was only partially impressed.

"You been pretty free telling us how rotten our ideas are," he informed Mr. Wilkins. "Mebby *you* got a notion how to turn the play." *

"Of course I have." Mr. Wilkins remained serene in the face of this implied criticism. "Here's what we'll do."

Mr. Wilkins spoke briefly, his hearers listening with a notable lack of enthusiasm.

"You say we'll steal Happy's clothes when he's asleep to-night?" Curley Fosskett repeated dubiously.

Mr. Wilkins curtly nodded.

"Sure; everything but his undershirt—including his extra pair of pants. That'll tie him to the bunk house. Miss Frances is only staying a week longer, I hear, and we just got to keep him from seeing her again."

"He'll help himself to our clothes," Red Connors objected.

"We'll cache all spare duds and sleep in

our pants. We'd be a bunch of poor friends to Happy if we couldn't do that little thing to save him."

"But goshamighty! When Happy finds his clothes gone he'll go loco. He'll start a-shooting and raising pertickler hell. These yere mild gents are the worst when they're riled."

"Naturally we'll remove his side arm along with his pants, chaps, shirt, and etcetery," Mr. Wilkins explained resignedly. "Glory be, what's the matter with you bucks? Ain't you got any imagination? I only gave you the synopsis."

The audience began to be visibly impressed, thawing toward this daring proposal.

"Happy's so doggoned modest," Mr. Wilkins resumed, "that he'd never dast leave the bunk house without his pants—the place being full of women like it is. We could go away during the day and be sure of finding him to home when we come back."

"But Happy's got regular work to do, same as the rest of us," came a final objection. "Frank Manwaring ain't going to fall in with no nonsense like this."

"Happy's just got word from his brother, Chass," Mr. Wilkins informed them. Chass Towers, it might be explained, owned a hay ranch down on Buffalo Creek. "Chass had a cayuse roll on him and broke his leg, so he's needing Happy for a few days. Happy couldn't locate Manwaring to ask leave of absence, and had to go fogging off in a terrible hurry, asking me to kindly explain things to his boss."

Curley Foskett was the first to surrender unconditionally. In an exuberance of delight he slapped his knee.

"By gum, it'll work!" he chuckled. "It's one bearcat of a project; it's a wow! I'm taking off my hat to you, Clem Wilkins!"

Mr. Wilkins received this tribute with graciousness and befitting modesty, rolling an eye at his fellows as if seeking further disparaging comment. None came. The gang was solidly sold on the proposition, with the trifling exception, that is, of the pessimistic Buckskin Boggs.

"It don't impress me as being noways a

fruity scheme," moodily declared Mr. Boggs, turning in an adverse report, which met the customary fate of such reports.

II.

WHEN Happy Towers opened his eyes to the dimness of dawn the following morning he was vaguely aware that something was wrong. His fellow riders had risen before him and were gone from the bunk house—surprising in itself, for one inclined to sleep after the others invariably met heroic treatment.

A casual glance impressed Happy that practically everything else in the bunk house had gone with the departed riders. Bare walls gleamed mockingly where divers spare garments were wont to hang drooping on rows of nails.

Puzzled, but not seriously alarmed, Happy rolled out of his bunk and proceeded to look for his clothes; the success which greeted his earnest search was far from startling.

"Humph!" Happy grunted dryly. "If suits was worth a million dollars apiece I'd be practically a bankrupt. Them short-horns have stripped me cleaner'n a hound dawg's tooth, looks like."

Some minutes later the cook, who perforce had been made a party to the plot, appeared with Happy's breakfast, cautiously keeping himself ready for a dash into the open in case the prisoner should be fractious. Happy, however, greeted him mildly.

"What's the big idea?" was his plaintive query on receiving the rations.

"You don't need to ask me about it," declared the cook, eying Happy distrustfully. "I'm obeying orders, I am." And he hastily departed.

"This," remarked young Mr. Happy Towers, as the cook left him to his own devices and the rifled bunk house, "is one hell of a note!"

It was the sad duty that day of Mr. Clem Wilkins to convey a party of mounted sight-seers to the remains of an ancient pueblo, tucked away under the overhanging walls of a huge cañon, some miles from the X Y Z ranch. This was really quite a

noteworthy curiosity, receiving due emphasis in the prospectus Frank Manwaring sent out to lure in his summer visitors.

A trip to this interesting place caused questions to flow from the lips of the beholders like water from a spigot, so that the unfortunate Mr. Wilkins derived no comfort from his assignment. The party ate a picnic lunch in what had been the court of the ruins, during which the guide slipped some distance away to enjoy a cigarette in blessed solitude.

Idly he sat, half dozing, when suddenly his ears were assailed by the soft swishing sound of an uncoiling lariat. Mr. Wilkins awoke from his lethargy, but too late, for his arms were pinioned to his sides.

Startled, dismayed, he beheld the figure of Happy Towers, fully clad in his regular garments, coming briskly toward him, not failing to keep the rope taut. In his utter astonishment at thus finding himself face to face with the man whom he supposed to be marooned in a pantless condition within the walls of the X Y Z bunk house, Mr. Wilkins resisted but feebly.

In the space of a few seconds he was hog-tied—and by an expert in the business. Happy Towers gazed complacently upon his work, finding it good.

The doubts and worry arising in the mind of Mr. Wilkins was for the moment mastered by a lively curiosity.

"How'd you get out, Happy?" he asked.

Happy Towers smiled sardonically.

"Didn't you ever think of blankets?" he blandly inquired. "I just draped one around me and hopped on the cook with both feet. You made a mistake telling him where my stuff was hid."

"Looks like I made more'n one mistake," Mr. Wilkins gloomed. "What are you aiming to do, Happy?"

"I'm not going to do any more to you than you did to me. You left me one undershirt, and I don't aim to be outdone in generosity. An undershirt you get—and that's all."

Mr. Wilkins's jaw wagged piteously.

"You mean to say, Happy," he gulped, "that you're going to take my pants—me with all this squad of hen-pilgrims on my hands?"

"Yep!" Happy assured him in a businesslike tone. "Your pants—and everything else, right down to your undershirt," and he proceeded to start the dirty work at the crossroads.

Then indeed did Mr. Wilkins resist—frantically, yet without avail. Happy was too powerful for him, ruthlessly stripping his victim right down to the threatened point; the purloined garments he made up into a compact bundle.

"Have a heart, Happy!" Mr. Wilkins moaned. "These yere pilgrims don't know the way home. I got to show 'em. And how'm I going to show 'em, clad in this here scandalous style?"

"That's your worry," Happy cruelly informed him. "Me, I had a date this morning with Miss Frances. You never bothered how I was a going to keep it—in an undershirt. Mebby one of them he-pilgrims will split his pants with you—fifty-fifty."

"But I done it for your own good, Happy," Mr. Wilkins told him unwisely.

"Yeah? Well, after this I'll be judge of what's for my own good. Savvy? But if it makes you feel any better, we'll just pretend that what I'm engaged in now is for your own good. So long!"

With which encouraging remark Happy Towers departed as abruptly and silently as he had come—carrying with him all of Clem Wilkins's belongings save the undershirt.

Desperately the wretched man started in pursuit, lured on by the vain hope that at the end Happy Towers might relent. The pursuit lasted a scant score of paces, ending suddenly as Mr. Wilkins perceived the ample figure of one of his charges coming toward him; no frightened rabbit ever scuttled down its hole with more vigor than Clem Wilkins displayed in ducking for the opening of an ancient habitation, fortunately close at hand.

The tourist moved aimlessly on, coming ever nearer to the dwelling which sheltered Mr. Wilkins. Another joined her, the sound of their placid voices reaching the hidden man.

He heard them discussing the possibility of arrowheads and pottery; heard a little

squeal of triumph, doubtless marking some sort of find. Then a period of silence.

Mr. Wilkins trusted they had turned back, vastly preferring that he be discovered—if discovery had to come—by a male member of the contingent.

Hope died as the silence was eventually broken, just beyond the entrance.

"I wonder where our estimable guide has gone," said one. "He disappeared in this direction."

"Isn't he picturesque?" was the other's comment.

"Indeed yes. So quaint."

The quaint Mr. Wilkins cowered miserably in a dark corner, muttering feverish nothings to himself; his eyes had the strange, glassy glare of a stag, hard pressed by baying hounds.

The explorers halted near the wall, sole screen between Clem Wilkins and profane gaze.

"They say these ruins date back hundreds of years; that the people who lived in them mysteriously disappeared, leaving no descendants and no explanation of their departure."

"But how can any one tell how long ago it was?"

"By trees, I fancy, which have started growing since the dwellings were abandoned."

The voices babbled calmly on; Mr. Wilkins heard, but the words were meaningless.

"If the durned fools would only do one of two things!" he groaned. "Bust in, if they got to, and get it over; or else go away. It's the strain that kills."

"Isn't it time to rejoin the rest?" At this the heart of the badgered Wilkins perked up a trifle, only to be submerged immediately.

"Don't be in a hurry, Clara; make the most of your opportunities. This ruin seems more imposing than the others. Why not take a look inside?"

"This ruin" was the one selected in his haste by Mr. Wilkins as temporary parking space. Every vestige of joy in living left him.

Steps again sounded; definite and purposeful. They were coming toward the door. Now they were at the door. Gladly

would Mr. Wilkins have fled, but escape was utterly impossible; he was caught in a one-way street.

Blissfully unconscious of what lay ahead, two respectable maiden ladies of uncertain age stepped within the portals of a dwelling where the only cover to conceal Clem Wilkins's shrinking form was an inch of dust on the floor. The light was dim, and their eyes, accustomed to the glare of the sun outside, at first discerned nothing amiss. Then the foremost intruder uttered a faint scream.

"Mercy, Clara! The place seems to be occupied."

The speaker's companion screamed in her turn, as a matter of course, and there followed a hasty retreat to the doorway, from which they peered dubiously back.

"It's only m-me, l-ladies," Clem stammered in agonized accents. "Wilkins. A polecat s-stole my p-pants."

Twin shrieks again rent the air; two pairs of eyes were chastely directed elsewhere; the pueblo threshold was vacated.

"Mercy me, Clara! Did you hear that?" came to Clem's blushing ears. "It's Mr. Wilkins, our guide! And he says a skunk stole his—er—trousers."

"How extraordinary!"

"Isn't it?" She tittered, the titter swelling to laughter in which her companion joined. Their laughter subsided to giggles, punctuated by inaudible whispers.

"Durn 'em!" Mr. Wilkins muttered viciously.

"What had we better do, Clara?" The voice was now purposely raised.

"Send me a man, you might," Mr. Wilkins suggested.

Dead silence ensued for a time. Then from the distance came an outburst of heartless mirth. Evidently news of Mr. Wilkins's sad plight had been relayed to the tourist party. Clem's thoughts became murky; unprintable, in fact.

After a brief delay two men appeared; they stood in the doorway and gazed in at Mr. Wilkins as at some rare exhibit. Their frank enjoyment in the sordid spectacle was most deplorable.

"I say, old chap, whatever happened?" one of them chuckled.

"What seems to be the trouble?" his companion added.

"Ain't you got eyes?" Clem made no effort to be polite.

"But the ladies said that some sort of animal had galloped off with your rags. How did it come about?"

"Never mind how it come about!" Mr. Wilkins frothed. "You might get me my slicker from my cayuse up on the cañon rim."

"Right-o!" was the crisp rejoinder, and the men departed.

Even in the partial sanctuary afforded by his rainproof coat the spirits of Mr. Wilkins refused to soar; he remained a blighted individual, painfully conscious of the amused glances and poorly concealed snickers of his tourists.

In the saddle Clem Wilkins ordinarily shone, a jaunty, care-free rider of easy grace and assured self-possession. Now he sat limply, like a wilted flower, unable to forget his bare shanks protruding from the yellow slicker, and bootless feet thrust lifelessly into the stirrups. The homeward journey was a hellish nightmare.

Arrived in due season at the X Y Z the stricken man fled to the bunk house for refuge, finding his garments there before him, but no other sign of Happy Towers—which, all in all, was perhaps fully as well. Clem Wilkins was in that parlous mental state best described as shootin' mad.

III.

DURING the rest of the day and that evening Happy Towers kept discreetly out of sight, while Clem Wilkins morosely nursed a grouch, oiling and polishing up his six-gun. His fellow riders diplomatically left him alone to his moody thoughts, tactful enough to make no reference to the unfortunate outcome of the plot in behalf of Happy Towers.

The saturnine Buckskin Boggs was the only one who took upon himself the privilege of remarks.

"Did I call the turn, or didn't I?" Mr. Boggs inquired darkly. "I figured that there scheme of yours would back fire, which the same it did. Next time mebbey

you'll listen to the sage counsel of a prudent, far-seeing gent."

Mr. Wilkins glowered balefully, but said nothing.

The following day Happy Towers continued in seclusion, although Mr. Wilkins made valiant efforts to locate him. Happy's absence was regarded by his fellows as sound military strategy. None of them knew where he was.

Not until evening of the second day did Happy Towers appear. The X Y Z wranglers were seated on a bench before the bunk house smoking, when suddenly, apparently materializing from nowhere, Happy was before them.

Warily the returned puncher sized up Mr. Wilkins, who, however, made no hostile move. The first flush of his righteous indignation had died.

"Well?" and Happy smiled questioningly.

"It ain't well," Mr. Wilkins declared frostily. "I wouldn't have treated a dawg the way you did me, after I done my best for you. But now I'm through!" The bitterness of a cruelly misjudged and ill-treated man rang in Mr. Wilkins's voice. "You can simmer in your own juice for all of me. Miss Frances Culver can twinkle her shining eyes at you all she wants; she can play with you and betray you, and I won't lift a finger to stop her. She can go away and leave your crushed and bleeding heart a laying on the ground, and I won't peep. That there siren can—"

"Hey!" Happy Towers unexpectedly and abruptly barked. "You quit making nasty cracks about my wife!"

"Your w-wife!" Mr. Wilkins gulped, goggle-eyed. The other wranglers were no less stupefied.

"Yes, sir, my wife!" Happy maintained stoutly. "We went down to Cañon City to-day and got married. I know Frances is a lot too good for me, but she was willing to take a chance." Whereupon Happy attempted, with scanty success, to appear as if he had said nothing extraordinary.

The awed silence which greeted his astounding news was followed by the rustle of dainty garments—and the former Miss Culver appeared. She flashed an adoring

little glance at Happy—which showed clearly enough what she thought of *him*, and then a coolly inquiring one at the X Y Z punchers.

"You boys may be interested to know," said she succinctly, "that I've just bought this dude ranch from Frank Manwaring." Shocks were falling thick and fast on Wilkins & Co., but this last one included Happy as well.

"I've always wanted to live in the West," young Mrs. Towers resumed, "and from now on I expect to. Happy's going to run the place, though all this is news to him. Naturally, I kept my plans a secret."

Her cold glance swept the uncomfortable cow-punchers.

"I might merely add that you men are hired to do your regular work, with no effort to manage the universe as a whole or control the destinies of your fellowmen," and her gaze dwelt in deadly significance on Mr. Wilkins, who looked most disconsolate.

"Yes, ma'am," said he abjectly.

Suddenly all the sternness melted from the pretty face of young Mrs. Happy Tow-

ers; she laughed—a silvery tinkle of spontaneous, infectious merriment.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed. "I think it was the funniest thing I ever heard of from start to finish. And I think you're adorable, every one of you." Her warm glance included even Mr. Wilkins. "I just know we'll be the best of friends, because you're all true friends of Happy's."

A moment of silence followed, and then the bride went on, a wistful, half shy note in her voice: "Aren't you going to congratulate Happy and me, and wish us happiness all our lives?"

Some time later the X Y Z wranglers were turning in for the night after a final smoke.

"Happy's sure a lucky cuss," Mr. Wilkins mused audibly.

"I'll say so," Buckskin Boggs agreed. "Look at him. Gets married—and then finds his girl's got money."

"To hell with the money part of it!" Mr. Wilkins remonstrated indignantly. "I wasn't thinking of that at all. I was thinking how lucky he is to marry a peach of a little girl like that Miss Frances Culver."

THE END



QUIRK

OH, Lucy was domestic-bent,
But Emily was not,
And often told her husband so,
With much of what is what!

Though Lucy went to work each day
Among the office bunch,
She dreamed of rugs and sheets and pans,
As they were eating lunch.

While Emily would envy those
Whose desk absorbed their days,
She slammed her broom and duster round
With helter-skelter ways.

If Emily had Lucy's place,
And Lucy had a home,
There would have been no reason why
For me to write this poem.

Sonia Ruthële Novák.



There Goes the Bride

By **EDGAR FRANKLIN**

Author of "Regular People," "Where Was I?" etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I AND II

WILLIAM ROBBINS, college graduate, sacrifices chances for bigger positions to drive a taxicab in the town of Arborton until he can effect a settlement of his father's estate with T. T. Trigg, former partner of his father. William has been secretly married to Anna Mills, who works as a waitress. For some reason Anna prefers to keep the marriage quiet and to remain employed, but William is driven half insane by the knowledge that John Bullard, a fast young man about town, takes advantage of his patronage of the restaurant to flirt with Anna. As the result of the couple's first quarrel, Anna disappears. William suspects various persons as being at the bottom of it and accuses them with embarrassing results. Laura, a waitress associate of Anna's, helps William in his nocturnal search for the missing girl, and when their car runs out of gasoline after an all-night chase Laura saves her reputation by announcing that she and William are married, and the news gets spread about Arborton.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL SETTLED.

WILLIAM, as it were, came to. No more than one second he devoted to a numbed stare at the mendacious Miss Deems; the next, he knew that he had heard aright. Laura was sit-

ting proudly erect, her chin in the air, the very picture of a proud young bride.

How thoroughly William had shaken off his lately bewildered state may be judged by the single detail that he did not plunge into hot denial. A dive into icy water could have cleared young Mr. Robbins's brain no more perfectly.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 26.

He knew beyond a peradventure that he had been dashed headlong into a complication which, ridiculous as it might be, was like to end almost anywhere—that Laura, whatever her precise motive, was going to stick to her story—that penetrating to the calm, normal reason of T. T. Trigg, supposing that to exist at all behind his permanent aura of black suspicion, was a task that would demand all William's natural craft and about as much more in addition, summoned for this particular emergency.

Confronted by a mess such as this, though, it is rarely a mistake to let the other fellow show his whole hand. William shut his teeth and waited for the next move; and it was made by T. T. Trigg.

This person, all in a minute or so, had undergone one of the most startling changes imaginable. The honest fury, the dark scowl, had left him; there had been a moment of open-mouthed wonder; and *now* T. T. Trigg was laughing in the most uproariously natural way! Yes—Trigg.

"Well, upon my soul!" he guffawed. "Upon my soul and honor! Well, why in the world did you ever keep it secret?"

"I just told you," Laura smiled complacently.

"I know, but—well, by gad!" beamed Mr. Trigg. "Well, that's fine—fine!"

And now he turned his beam upon William Robbins.

"I knew it!" he said, with a great sigh of relief. "I knew there couldn't be a crooked hair in the head of Sam's son!"

"Yes, you seemed to know it!" William mused.

"Eh? Don't blame me for acting as I did. It was for your own good, Willie—you know that. But *why*, if it was Laura, did you deny it and—"

"Well, as I said," pursued Laura—and it struck William very suddenly that possibly caution had not been best here after all, for the young woman had grown vastly more assured—"as I said, we thought we sort of ought to keep it quiet and everything like that, and I suppose maybe Will felt he'd better respect my wishes and not say who he married and—"

"Who? He didn't say he'd married any

one!" Mr. Trigg put in, and his smile died. "In fact, he led me to—to another and very distressing conclusion. But—well, that's all past and you don't know how delighted I am.

"I couldn't have thought of a better, prettier wife for Willie, Laura, and—oh, I may be cranky sometimes and say things I'm sorry for—but I couldn't have thought of a better husband for you, my dear. I—why, I'm just delighted!"

William smiled faintly. Delighted, was he? Well, his delight was about to glide headlong into an untimely grave! Because it was William's intention now to advise Mr. Trigg that for one glance at proofs of his marriage to this elephantine damsel he'd hand over his full inheritance and, further, work free of charge for T. T. Trigg for the rest of his life—to advise Mr. Trigg that never before had the mistaken young woman so much as ridden around one of Arborton's squares in his company and that she never would again—to advise both of them, in conclusion, that they might wrangle it out to their heart's content, but that he, William, was about to move on about his own concerns!

It would have to be done in crisp, incisive phrases, brooking no interruptions and no questions until he had quite finished; and that in itself was by way of being an undertaking; but William had a number of things to do before catching that eleven o'clock train, so he sat up and opened his mouth.

And closed it as T. T. Trigg spoke.

"Well, *now*, Willie, I'll tell you something!" T. T. Trigg said. "You can have your twenty-five thousand dollars before this day is out!"

"His—his—his *what*?" shrieked Laura.

"His twenty-five thousand dollars, my child," Mr. Trigg grinned. "He never told you about that?"

"He—certainly never did," said Laura, and smiled dizzily at William and then, without warning, hurled herself upon him and encircled his neck with one large arm. "Oh, Will! I'm glad we told!"

She was really overcome! So, for that matter, was William Robbins, but he disengaged himself presently.

"You—you'll do that, sir?" he asked hoarsely.

"For Laura's husband, I certainly will, my boy," T. T. Trigg laughed. "And now I'll ease your mind," he chuckled. "That money's been funded for a matter of nearly two years; I could have handed you your check at any time within twenty-four hours!"

"And you—you will—this morning?" William croaked on.

"If not this morning, this afternoon."

"But if—right away—"

"Just as soon as possible, lad," said Mr. Trigg, and patted his shoulder.

And William Robbins, flushed, nodded and said no more.

At first glance it may seem that this was confirming the lady's announcement in a remarkably obliging and altogether unwarranted way. But William, obviously enough, had his own very good reasons for silence. Why, if he could get his hands on his inheritance before the eleven o'clock train went out, he'd have enough to finance years of searching, should that prove necessary, or to find a little home for Anna, should it not!

And even if he did not contrive that before eleven—so ran his almost criminally cunning thought—he could convince Laura easily that business necessitated his departure and leave it to her to see that the money was forwarded this afternoon. Lies no longer counted for anything, so that he made the eleven o'clock train and secured his wealth!

"Mr. Trigg," he said suddenly, "I'll have to run along now and attend to a thing or two, but if you could meet me at the bank at ten o'clock—"

"Hang the bank!" cried T. T. Trigg's new, big, heavy voice. "We'll get at that later. Come—both of you!"

"Come where?" asked Laura.

"You haven't got a home, have you?"

"Us?" smiled Laura.

"Yes!"

"No!" sighed Laura.

"Then come with me and don't ask questions!"

"Well—you take Laura—wherever it is," William said quickly, "and presently I—"

"Doggone your contrary hide!" cried the president in exasperation. "Does a man have to hit you over the head with a club to drive in anything? I'm not going to kidnap you, Willie. I've got a pleasant little surprise for you."

"Yes, but—"

"Aw, listen, Will!" Laura said playfully. "Let's go see what it is!"

"There!" the president cried delightedly. "I'll bet a girl like that wouldn't have to tease me, if she was mine. Come along, you pig-headed young jackanapes!"

"Yeah—sure, Will. Come!" teased Laura.

"We'll go in my car and—by golly! I'll take a day off for once!" Mr. Trigg announced, and instantly amended: "Part of a day, anyhow, and let's not waste that."

"Aw, Will!" pleaded the lady, embracing him again.

Young Mr. Robbins quickened suddenly. The rest of the factory force arrived a little later than did its proprietor, as he knew; well, a dozen of them were on hand now and they had not trooped into the mill as usual. Rather they were standing about at no great distance and drinking in the scene, the while grinning most appreciatively.

Abruptly William flushed and rose.

"Yes—all right!" he grunted.

"I give it up!" T. T. Trigg muttered, as he led the way. "I don't know what to make of this new generation. They—they're queer!"

He opened the door of his sedan and bowed them in with mock ceremony. A moment he spoke to one of his foremen, telling him that the works would be without a head this morning and causing the foreman to gasp uncomprehendingly. Then T. T. Trigg turned about and drove back through Arborton.

"Where we going?" Laura asked happily.

"Wait!" said T. T. Trigg.

"Well—er—not any great distance?" William asked nervously. "I mean, we won't be gone very long?"

"Wait!" repeated Mr. Trigg, and added: "Will, if you're worrying about that fool job of yours, stop worrying. You're done

with that sort of thing. When you were a bachelor, you could do as you pleased—but Laura Deems's husband can't be a taxi driver!"

"Well, but—"

"No!" the president cried indignantly. "You—maybe. But not Laura's husband by a very long shot! No, siree! Hereafter, Willie, whether you leave your money in the firm or take it out, you'll spend your days in the mill. We'll arrange all that this afternoon. You'll be my personal assistant and second in command."

Laura, apparently, was on the very verge of fainting with pure joy.

"Will—oh, Will!" she said breathlessly.

"Listen, Will! Ain't that *grand*?"

"Yep," William said grimly, and said no more.

Only where in blazes *were* they going?

Young Mr. Robbins looked about with growing anxiety. He could not afford any joy-rides this morning! It was well past eight now and he had a great many things to do before—oh, they were heading in here, at the pretty little white house on the side street, with its green blinds and its climbing roses.

Now they were stopping beside the porch. T. T. Trigg, turning in his seat, waved a gay hand toward the dwelling.

"There, children!" he cried. "Yours for as long as you want it!"

"Huh?" said William.

"My tenant went out two months ago, and the house has all been done over from cellar to attic. That's a new roof up there, and I paid two hundred and eighty dollars for the new furnace. And perhaps, if you're almighty good kids," Mr. Trigg grinned meditatively, "later on it might just be that I'd make you a wedding present of it!"

"Oh, Mr. Trigg!" Laura screamed.

William did not scream. William just sat and gazed at the attractive little home. *There* would have been a nest for Anna!

And instead of arriving with Anna, he had come to it with this doubtless estimable but still gigantic female, under false colors. A wave of hot-shame swept over William. The truth slid to the very tip of his tongue, for there was no justification for this!

Yet be it said that the truth did not quite escape. William, remember, had a long hunt ahead and he needed his inheritance very badly; so he flushed and ground his teeth and wondered, with a shiver, whether that adoring smile of Laura's—it seemed to him that the really adoring quality had appeared only since Trigg's mention of the twenty-five thousand—actually had any sincerity behind it! And after this uncomfortable phase William braced himself and tried quite successfully to appear the natural, happy bridegroom. He had been wrong; the end in this case justified any means!

"So now come in and look around, and don't ever say again that the old man's nothing but a grouch," Trigg chuckled, as he descended and jingled keys.

The interior of the place was just as pretty as the exterior, too; William shuffled along between Trigg and his ostensible bride and forced out a comment now and then. Something unfortunate had happened to the last tenant, it appeared, and Trigg had purchased furniture and all for a song, when the family departed.

The new tenant felt gloom thickening all about him, as they went from room to room; something unfortunate, he felt, was going to happen to him, too! Why, neighboring women were watching, beaming from the houses on either side; the newly married couple were becoming every second a more firmly established fact and—well, *what of it?* Once he got out of Arborton on the eleven o'clock express, he was never coming back. If Laura gathered any unpleasant fruits of her mendacity, that was on her own head and—

"Will!" chuckled Mr. Trigg, and nudged the younger man as they stood in the doorway of the sunny second bedroom.

"Uh?" said William.

"This one'll make a pretty good nursery, hey?"

"Why, Mr. Trigg!" cried Laura, and turned away. "Ain't you ashamed?"

"No, I dunno's I am," T. T. Trigg responded meditatively. "I'm an old man and I'm just hoping to see that nursery filled up. And now look here, young ones," he concluded, and put an arm about either

of them. "I'll run along back to the mill—and you come down about two, Will, and we'll settle things."

"I haven't got so much to do this morning," William said quickly. "I can just as well go down to the bank with you now!"

"You stay here and get acquainted with your new home," the president said stubbornly, and turned to Laura. "Honey, you want I should stop at Wray's grocery and tell him to have the boy call for an order?"

"Why—yes," said Laura.

"And I'll have the butcher stop, too; the telephone isn't connected up, of course. May as well have Moggins leave some ice, too."

"Oh—yes," the young woman agreed. "About a hundred pounds, I think. That's a terrible big box."

"All right. And as for bed and table linen and silver and china, I think you've got everything here you'll need for years. Mrs. Nast was a mighty nice careful housekeeper and she had about everything."

"You can see she was neat," said Laura. "You—you're awful good, Mr. Trigg! We don't deserve nothing like this!"

"Shucks!" cried the president, and slapped William's back so heartily that his vertebræ crackled. "Now you're all set, hey? Well, I'll get out and leave you to your spooning; you don't want an old codger like *me* around," Mr. Trigg stated, and winked roguishly at William. "And now good luck to you both!"

He beamed. Laura simpered. William thought rapidly.

"Er—Mr. Trigg," said he. "This afternoon—well, this afternoon there'll be a lot of fixing up I want to do around the house here and—"

"Ain't a thing to be fixed," the president assured him cheerily. "Mrs. Nast never left a pin out of place."

"But—but even so, there'll be a lot of things we want to arrange differently and—and all that; and I'd just like to—well, to get into an old pair of pants and so on, and keep at them till dark. So I might just as well start down town now with you and we can stop at the bank on the way and—"

"No, you mightn't, Willie," T. T. Trigg corrected, in his flat way, "because I've got to get down to that mill without any stops. Them two new carloads of white pine that came in yesterday didn't look to me fit for firewood, and I've got to see 'em myself and look 'em over careful before they start running them through."

And, with this disposed of, Mr. Trigg waved his horny hand and strode out of the pretty little home. Even when his car had been backed out into the street and headed down town, the baffled William had not moved.

"Oh, ain't Mr. Trigg been simply wonderful to us!" Laura breathed.

"Er—what?" said William awakening.

"Don't you think he has—dear?" Laura inquired, and her large blue eyes rolled at William Robbins.

"No, I don't. And don't start any of that 'dear' business, Laura!" William said bluntly. "You're not in love with me and I'm not in love with you and—and I'm sort of queer about such things, I guess. I don't throw around the 'dears' and the 'darlings' as a good many people do nowadays."

"What—Will?" Laura faltered:

"You understand perfectly."

"You're thinking of that—of Anna!"

"Don't concern yourself with my thoughts!" William snapped, most impolitely. "I can at—"

"Listen, Will!" said Laura, and loomed close to him and spoke with a strange and simple earnestness. "What—what you feel for that girl is just mad infatuation. What you'll feel for me," said Laura, and lowered voice and eyes together, "is real love!"

"Is it?" said William, who must have been simply a mass of callous. "We'll never know about that, I'm afraid. Now! What possessed you to tell Trigg that we were married?"

"What, Will?" the girl gasped, in overwhelming astonishment. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said!"

"Why, what—what else could I tell him?"

"Anything under the sun except that fool—"

"Why—why, Will! Listen, Will!" the young woman interrupted, and her indignation seemed genuine enough. "Certainly you must understand that I couldn't possibly have said anything else. I was waiting for you to say it and—and you didn't and I had to tell him myself!"

"Well, why should I—"

"Now, Will, I don't think this is nice—I don't think this is called for at all, talking like this to me. He found us there asleep, didn't he? Well, would any nice girl be found like that with—with any man but her husband? What would Mr. Trigg have thought of me if I hadn't told him just what I did tell him, and him an old friend of papa's, too?"

"I give it up," said William, "but—"

"The way it looks to me, Will, you don't care so terribly much about my reputation, one way or the other. You get me into this trouble and then you seem to think you can—"

"I didn't get you into anything, Laura; you went along of your own accord," William said smoothly. "However, let's not get into a fight about that; there are too many more important things on hand."

"You mean, getting settl—"

"First place," William hurried on in his innocent way, "I want you to do something for me, will you?"

"I'd die for you," said Laura.

"Well, I wouldn't quite ask that," young Mr. Robbins grinned, "but this much I wish you'd do: get down there to the restaurant and on the job, Laura, and see if any of the girls know anything about where Anna went—I mean, where she intended to stop in the city, of course."

Miss Deems's countenance was rather black.

"I don't understand!" she said.

"Well, I mean, ask around quietly and—"

"No, but this talk about Anna. That's what I'm speaking about!" the lady said quite shrilly. "What have I got to do with Anna? What's Anna got to do with you?"

"Eh?" said William, and was genuinely startled.

"I certainly got a right to ask that ques-

tion—now!" said Laura, significantly and with spirit.

"A—a right?" gasped William.

"I could be nasty about your bringing up the subject of that little hussy if I liked. Plenty of girls would be. But I'm not that kind, Will! I always say, let bygones be bygones and if a man had a mad infatuation once upon a time, most likely he isn't the first man that had—or that lived to regret it, for that matter.

"There's a lot of girls would fly right off the handle, with you talking like that, but, as I say, I ain't that kind! I always believe that happiness ought to come first in any family and that it's the duty of both sides to forgive and forget, once they're married and settled down and—"

"Say! What's the matter with you?" William managed to cry. "You—you don't think we actually are married, do you?"

"Certainly, I don't think we're married. I'm not crazy, Will. But we're going to be married before night."

"Eh?"

"Ain't we?" Laura asked breathlessly, amazedly.

"Well, not if I see it first, Laura," said William, with entire calm. "I don't quite get the idea of all this, but—"

"Will!" the lady gasped out, in the most dramatic way. "What do you mean? You ain't refusing to marry me, after—after all this?"

"All what?" William inquired.

"After all you've done to me!"

"Say, look here!" young Mr. Robbins began fiercely. "You know mighty well—"

"I know you compromised me so's I never can hold up my head in this town again before decent people, except as your wife! I know a lot of people saw me start off with you last night—what'll they think? And some of those men saw me near Gar-rivan's with you, too—what'll they think? And, what's more, that man with Bullard saw me plain, Will Robbins, and it was at an hour no decent girl'd be driving with a man that wasn't her husband, as you know perfectly well. And on top of all that, Mr. Trigg finds us the way he found us and—and still you can refuse—oh, Will!" the girl

cried, and seemed to melt into an ocean of tears behind her handkerchief. "No matter how madly you was infatuated with that little creature, you couldn't do a thing like that to a girl like me!"

It may as well be admitted that William was somewhat shaken. Yet he recovered himself very rapidly. Above and beyond all else, this was no morning for the wasting of time; he had a bag to pack, clothes to change, a breakfast to snatch; more important than all the rest, he had a final attack to make upon T. T. Trigg in the hope that eleven might see his inheritance in his pocket, "Certified" nicely stamped across its face.

He glanced at Laura and was not so comfortable; dabbing her perfectly dry cheeks, the young person was looking at him—and for the very first time William understood that her eye could be shrewd and calculating. He swallowed at the peculiar dryness in his throat; he smiled seductively.

"Laura," said William, ever so gently, "that's all just imagination, you know. Nothing at all has happened that will make people talk. And as for our getting married—why, that would be ridiculous."

"Oh! Is that so? Is that how *you* feel about it? Well, let me tell you one thing, Will Robbins! With all your soft words and your nice smiles, you can't talk me out of what's my honest right.

"You don't understand that there's some things more precious to a woman than her life, which she'll fight for like a tiger. And, as I said before, Will, I'm a girl nobody ever could say *that* about!" Laura panted. "So we're going to have my cousin Bessie over here from the Falls, just as quick as she can get here, with her husband and their minister; and we'll be married just as soon as they're here—very quiet, and we'll hope that nobody'll ever find out the real date of the ceremony, because I never could hold up my head again if they did, but we'll be married right here in our own home and stay here! I wonder if that woman next door has a telephone?"

And now she drew herself up triumphantly; her eyes snapped; her shoulders squared; she was every inch the dominating female—and still, she failed to dominate

William. His own eyes snapped; his cheeks flushed darkly.

"Pardon me for seeming to have anything to say about my own affairs," he said, "but you and I are not going to be married here, or anywhere else."

"You mean that?"

"I do—you bet!" William hissed. "And don't think for one second that—"

"Say, listen, Will!" the lady interrupted dangerously. "I don't have to think. I know! Certainly I always thought you were quicker and brainier than the average, but I got to say the way you act you ain't so bright! Do *you* think for one second that Mr. Trigg 'll let me be treated like this when I tell him the truth, and—and whatever more I have to tell him?" Laura demanded and smiled suddenly.

"You think for a second, just because he's handing you twenty-five thousand dollars, that I'll let you go and—maybe find that little hussy again? Well, you don't know me, Will Robbins! And another thing: you near killed a man last night and it ain't going to be so long before you're pinched!"

"Huh?" grunted William.

"Yes, and I was one of the witnesses, Will Robbins, and it could just happen that as between going to prison for maybe twenty or thirty years—and Johnny Bullard's old man thinks the sun rises and sets for that soft-boiled egg, and he's a millionaire and he'd spend whatever was necessary to send you up for that long or maybe more—as I was saying, it could just happen that you'd get down on your knees and beg me to marry you, legal and proper and regular, for the sake of getting a wife that couldn't testify against you! So what about *that*?" asked Laura, and rested her right hand upon her plentiful hip.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HAPPY PAIR.

IT was entirely true: this phase of the affair had never once entered William's disturbed mind. It is true, too, that he started and stared at Laura for a moment in something so like terror that the young

woman smiled exultingly, showing her fine, big teeth.

But it is just as true that, the moment passed, William's brain whizzed back to the main problem, which was time—priceless time! Miss Deems, whatever she may have been before, was implacably outraged with his twenty-five thousand dollars in sight.

It seemed safe enough to assume that she would keep right on being outraged to the bitter end, which might come to-day or to-morrow or next year. All right, then! William was leaving on the eleven o'clock train, just the same, if he had to exhaust every means short of physical violence—and really, while she might be obstinate, Miss Deems was not—or William at that time assumed that she was not—staggeringly bright!

William smiled suddenly. It was an entirely new smile. It was composed of just one hundred per cent pure surrender!

"I guess you win, Laura," he said gently.

"What, Will?"

"It looks that way to me," pursued William, and his smile grew franker.

"We—we're going to be married this afternoon?"

"I—ah—yes!" grinned William Robbins, since there were no witnesses about.

"Oh, Will!" said the girl, with a great, glad cry, "I—I knew you were a fellow to be trusted. Only I was so worried!"

"Worry no more, Laura," said William.

"I won't, Will. Listen, Will! Kiss me!"

"Not—not till we're actually married," the chaste young man said rather hastily.

"Oh, don't be silly, Will. Everybody spoons a little!" Miss Deems smiled.

"Not me—I never was built that way," Mr. Robbins said firmly. "I suppose I'm queer, but I was brought up in pretty strict fashion. As a matter of fact, you're right about appearances. I've been thinking of that these last minutes. It's not right for me to be here with you until after the ceremony, Laura. I'm going!"

"Going where?"

"Oh, just around town somewhere, till your cousin and her husband get here with the minister."

"When'll you be back, Will? Will you be back for lunch?"

"Why—oh, yes, of course, if you wish," William smiled, and made slowly, cautiously toward the door, smiling still.

Laura shook her head suddenly.

"I'm going with you," she announced.

"No! Don't do that, because—"

"Oh, yes, I will!" Laura laughed playfully. "Because so long as we've settled everything, we'll just go tell everybody we were married long ago, and that'll kill any gossip before it can start. That's a good idea, Will."

"Maybe it is, but we—we won't do it," young Mr. Robbins said hastily. "No! No, I feel funny about that. I feel as if it were tempting fate. I might be—be killed, or something, and then we'd never really be—er—married."

"Oh, I don't think so, Will. Not with me there to look after you. Come!"

"No," said young Mr. Robbins, and seated himself. "Let's stay right here!"

"And plan all the grand things we're going to do with that money, Will?" Laura said delightedly, and arrived upon his lap with a suddenness which suggested to William that both knee joints and one thigh-bone had been shattered and ruined forever!

"Ah—ah—yes!" he gasped.

Well—he had not escaped that time, had he? And minutes were spinning along as if they counted for nothing at all. He tried to see his watch and failed; little Laura was leaning affectionately on that arm. Ah, yes, and now she was about to embrace him—*was* embracing him, in fact, and beaming down vastly upon him as she said:

"Why, Willie Robbins, you need a shave! I never saw you needing a shave before!"

"I know it, honeybunch," responded William with a fittingly foolish smile, as inspiration flashed up once more. "That's one of the things I meant to do, you know—stop in at my room and clean up for the wedding."

"Oh, you don't look so bad."

"Well, doggone it! I'm not going to be married with an inch of whiskers on my chin!" young Mr. Robbins protested, in

quite boyish indignation. "You just hop up and I'll get down there and shave—and pack my duds at the same time and rustle back here. Gosh! this is a pretty little place, isn't it?"

"Ain't it, Will?" the lady said raptly. "Even if we're only gone an hour, I'll be dying to get back!"

"Oh, you're not going down there with me—darling," William said quickly. "No, no! You don't know my landlady. She can look right through anybody and tell what they're thinking and—"

"Well, she can't look through me, because I'm too well built," said Miss Deems, "and even if she does she can't see anything I'm ashamed of, Will. We'll tell her first of all!"

"Nope! Not her!" Mr. Robbins laughed. "I'm afraid of her and I can't lie and look natural, anyway. She'd suspect in a minute that something was wrong—and I won't let you take a chance like that, sweetheart!"

"Well, listen, Will! You weren't so careful about what chances I took a little while ago," the bride-to-be said thoughtfully and returned to a consideration of his chin. "Oh, you don't look bad, Will. You'd hardly notice it, in fact. Let's just stay here and be happy."

"Well—all right," William said faintly.

And on went the minutes—and on—and on.

"Oh, gee!" Laura squealed in sudden delight, and bounced to her feet. "There's the grocer boy, coming to us for the very first time, Will! I'll order things for lunch!"

She sped away. Young Mr. Robbins's arms hung down limply over the arms of his chair; he felt somewhat compressed and exhausted, but his legs seemed to have survived. And that, unhappily, was more than could be said for his recent supply of optimism.

He glanced toward the front door. Laura, ordering, occupied it entirely.

"Hon-ey!" Laura called.

"Uh?" said William.

"Do you like canned salmon?"

"Aha," said William.

"Canned salmon, two cans," said Laura.

"Now, let me see. What kind of vegetables have you got to-day?"

"Well, now, le's see, Mis' Robbins—" came the voice of the grocer's middle-aged "boy."

William was actually hearing it—yes. Or maybe the strain of recent events had been too much for his mental equilibrium? Or maybe he was still asleep somewhere? Or—well, as he knew mighty well, he was none of these things or anything else save a condemned fool for ever having allowed Laura to ride with him last night!

He hitched to an upright position and glanced about again: doubtless there was a rear door; and if Laura would stand just as she was for a moment it was remotely possible that he might reach the rear door and—well, Laura had turned back to face him.

"Sweetie lamb!" Laura called.

"What?" snarled sweetie lamb.

"You like asparagus—nice asparagus?"

"I guess so."

"Asparagus, then," said the housewife, self-consciously, and simpered. "You see, we—we haven't been married very long and I don't know just what Mr. Robbins does like to eat. We're just starting house-keeping and—oh, did I order pepper and salt and spices? I want to get those little things all at once."

William shook his head and gnawed in the most inconsiderate way at his upper lip. What next? Quick!—what next? The propriety idea had fallen flat. The shaving idea had failed just as completely. What in blazes *does* a man do that cannot well be shared by his wife? Why, business, to be sure!

"Ah—Laura, dear," William said, gravely, suavely, and rose as she returned. "I don't want to go, of course, and I won't be very long. But while you're putting things in shape here I'll run down and see Mr. Trigg about some business."

"What business?" Laura asked alertly.

"Oh, just a thousand things I want to know about the mill and my job and so on, and—"

"All right!" Laura said brightly. "Let's!"

"Oh, but darling—not you! You'd be

bored to death. You stay right here while—"

"I don't want you to go alone," Miss Deems pouted, although it cannot be said that any of the pout was in her eyes. "I think every woman ought to know as much about her husband's business as he does. I think I ought to know all about yours."

"Of course—and so you shall, when I've had a chance to learn something about it myself," Mr. Robbins still smiled. "But as for this little trip—"

"Why don't you be honest and say that you don't want to take me?" Laura demanded.

"I don't—not down there," William responded, blandly. "It is not the place for you."

Miss Deems's ample chest expanded; her mouth, also, set.

"Well, I think it is, and Mr. Trigg likes me and he won't mind my coming with you one little bit. And so I'm just going with you!"

"But that's ridiculous! That—"

"Why is it ridiculous?" flared Laura. "Is it ridiculous for a girl like me to want to share her husband's business troubles and help him all she can? Is—is it ridiculous for a girl like me to want to go out with her husband? I ask you that! And, listen, Will! You don't understand, I guess, but a girl like me—"

"All right!" yelled William, with a volcanic vehemence that amazed himself. "Then we'll stay right here!"

"Well, certainly we'll stay right here!" the lady responded, with equal venom. "And, what's more, I won't sit in your lap again!"

"Aha?" mumbled William Robbins.

And so—on with the next inspiration!

There wasn't any! So far as concerned William, further inspirations needn't bother to materialize. Laura seemed able to send each one into oblivion even before it had uttered its first effective little peep.

The young woman was sitting across the room now, casting reproving sidelong glances at William and finally smiling coyly. William did not heed. If clever inspirations were valueless, how about a little sheer brutality?

Be not alarmed; William did not contemplate beating this young lady into insensibility. But he did make a quick, cautious survey, with a view to binding and gagging her as gently and courteously as might be possible—made his survey and instantly abandoned the whole notion.

Laura, primarily, was powerful. Instinct, doubtless, would advise her, should William grow playful in just this manner that he was still bent upon escape; and before any binding and gagging ever had been accomplished it was a rather safe bet that neighbors from at least a dozen houses round about would have rushed in to learn why all the recent Mrs. Nast's furniture was being wrecked so noisily. Still further—

"Listen, Will!" said Laura.

"I am listening," William croaked numbly.

"Maybe I better see about getting Bessie and her husband and the minister?"

"To-morrow'll do just as well."

"Why! Will Robbins!" the girl gasped. "Listen, Will! Why don't we get a car and drive over there and get married in Bessie's house? That would be safer."

"Yes, and it would be better all round," poor, silly William cried and arose. "I'll go get one."

"No, we'll go get one!"

"See here, Laura! Do you think I'm to be treated as a prisoner just because I'm your husband?" William demanded, with cold dignity. "If I'm not to be trusted as far as one of the garages it would be a good deal better if we called off the whole thing!"

And—well, by the well-known rood! He'd hit a sensitive spot! Laura actually was looking at him in a rather frightened and apologetic way; her lips were working.

"Listen, Will!" she said. "You—you don't understand how a girl like me feels about a thing like this. You've still got some of that—that nasty little cat in your head; I can see it in your eye. And I wouldn't accuse you of a thing, Will; only you might find her. And it's like this, Will. Maybe if you was just poor, I'd—I'd think it over, because I'd be the last one to be a burden on any one. But you ain't; you got a fine job now and lots of money,

Will Robbins, and I—I got a clear conscience in insisting on my rights."

"Very well," said William, and sat down again and folded his arms. "I was going down to get a big car and buy you one of those little narrow platinum wedding rings and do the whole thing up pretty nice, Laura. But if that's the way you feel about me I simply refuse to marry you, now or any other time! Shall I go or not?"

He stiffened, too, did William; he fixed the young lady with a hard eye; and the young lady considered for a moment and then shook his head.

"I don't know what to say, Will," she sighed, and arose. "I'll have to go next door and see if they have a telephone—and tell Mr. Trigg the whole truth and—"

"Hey?" escaped William, and became less determined.

"—see what he advises me to do. He was a friend of papa's."

"Well, don't do that!" the unfortunate young man said quickly and hurried across and laid a detaining hand on her arm. "No! I was just fooling, Laura. I didn't mean a word of it!"

"Then—"

"Not a word and I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go down together and hire a nice car and drive over there and—what are you shaking your head about?"

"I got a feeling, Will!" said the stupid Laura. "About driving over there. You—we might have an accident or something."

"Nonsense! We'll just—why, you know I'm a good driver."

"I know, Will, but I got that funny feeling just the same. I have these feelings lots of times; they come kind of queer and sudden, Will, and if I don't pay any attention to them I'm always sorry for it afterward. No, I'll go telephone for Bessie and her husband and the minister!"

Twice William swallowed at his emotion. Then he smiled!

"All right. If that's what you want to do that's what we'll do. Only I'll hunt up the telephone and do the talking, because it looks and sounds like the dickens for a girl to be making arrangements of that kind."

"Why, no it doesn't, Will," Laura said readily. "There'll only be women home,

this time of day—and us women understand each other, Will."

She smiled and patted his cheek and considered William meditatively, as if looking him over for flaws.

"You stay here, sweetie," she said. "If the iceman comes tell him to be sure and fill the box."

And William, who meant to catch the eleven o'clock train or die, smiled back at her; and of all the craft and deceit that was in him at this moment, not one little trace appeared in the smile.

Indeed, this oil-smeared grimace seemed both to please and to reassure Laura, and so did the lazy, homelike way in which William settled himself in one of the big, comfortable chairs and waved what certainly looked like an affectionate hand.

"Run along and fix it your own way, honeybunch," he yawned. "I'll look after the iceman."

"Well—"

"Oh—and, sweetheart!" William called, as with whatever reluctance she made for the door.

"Yes?"

"What about the butcher? What do you want if he comes before you get back?"

Laura frowned—and then smiled brilliantly at William. It was the fact! By this last remark, Laura had been disarmed.

"Oh, Will, I'm so glad!" she said, quite irrelevantly.

"Eh?"

"Oh, just get a little steak, I guess," Laura caroled as she departed.

Was William learning? In coldest fact, William was! Thirty seconds after the door's closing, and William had not moved. One minute, and still William was lolling back, eyes closed; and then the beautiful accuracy of his guess had been confirmed, for the door had opened again without warning and Laura, face aflame, was before him.

"Hey—what?" said William, starting up. "Gosh! I guess I was almost asleep!"

"I—oh, Will—I—" Laura stammered and abruptly surged over to William and kissed the top of his head. "I—I beg your pardon, Will!" she said contritely. "I'd ought to be whipped! I'd ought to know you wasn't that kind of a fellow, but—"

Enigmatic remark all unfinished, she fled. The door slammed, her fairly gentle footsteps scraped rapidly down the cinder path.

And William returned to sleep? Oh, no! Ere Laura's third scrape had been scraped, William Robbins was out of his chair, crouched like an Apache scout below the level of the window sills. Two tense seconds he paused, shielded by the curtains, and watched; Laura was indeed entering the house next door!

William laughed, in about the key an Apache scout might have used when coming upon a pile of neatly scalped palefaces, and bent lower and raced through the little dining room and into the kitchen. There he straightened up and bounded to the back door of the home.

He turned the key. He turned the knob and yanked—and out into the sunshine stepped William Robbins, a free man on his way to the eleven o'clock train!

That experience, Heaven be praised, was over!

Only what wouldn't he have given for a car—even for a friendly lift! He looked around swiftly and then grinned; if every recent wish had been realized as quickly as this one, he'd have been the happiest man in the State! Right there in the side street, standing still, was the rattlesome flivver of Thomas Bemis, constable, and, William hoped, friend.

A rather comical character, too, this Bemis, to William's mind—a lank, powerful man of forty or so, with a long, lean face and a stare, carefully cultivated, that should have frozen the very soul of a criminal. He said very little; he affected a slouch hat, which he wore at the most effective angle; eternally, he smoked a long, thin cigar.

To this person, who stared harder than ordinarily, William bounded. The door of the car was opened for him; he entered and Bemis chuckled once.

"Just coming with me, hey?"

"You bet!" said William.

"Watching for me, were you, Robbins?"

"Watching for somebody. Let's get on down town."

"I'll say you were!" rumbled the constable. "Hear you're married, Robbins?"

"So they tell me."

"Don't want your wife to know? That the cause of the rush?"

"Yes—yes! Let's go now!" young Mr. Robbins said nervously.

"Know sooner or later, won't she?"

"Of course, but—but I don't want her to know now!"

"I see," grunted Mr. Bemis. "We'll go down the back street."

Conversation, as a quantity, dropped stone dead at this point. His cigar elevated at an acute angle, the constable gripped his little steering wheel and rattled his way to the far end of the square—turned down town, and drove on. William chuckled relievedly. He then chuckled merrily as he glanced at Bemis's profile.

Funny bird, you know. All business, day or night, whatever the occasion. Why, just to look at him now, to note the terrible set of his long jaw and the occasional glance he cast at William, one might have fancied him the head of the State constabulary, bringing in a red-handed murderer and—well, confound him! he was swinging down toward the town hall, which was also the jail and several other things, and was, furthermore, a long square out of William's way.

However, it was better than running, and Bemis was traveling at his usual mad pace. If only he had business at the extreme end of Arborton—well, he had not, apparently, for he was squealing to a standstill at the side of the hall. William sighed resignedly.

"Well—much obliged for giving me the lift," said he.

"Oh, don't mention it. No trouble," Mr. Bemis responded with a dry smile.

"Do as much for you some day and—"

"Wait, Robbins! Where you going?"

"Say, I've got a billion things to do before—"

"Stay here and do 'em, my boy!" the constable said dangerously.

"Eh?" grinned William, and would have descended, but that the other caught his wrist in a grip of iron.

"Cut that out, Robbins!" said the constable. "You know perfectly well you're pinched!"

William, of course, laughed outright.

"Sure," he cried gayly, for his spirits had

been rising every second since his escape. "Only let go, Tom. I haven't got any time for fooling this morning or—"

Further than this, William did not say. An extraordinary thing had happened: for the first time in his life a pair of steel handcuffs had been snapped on William, and the constable was clutching the connecting link and smiling grimly.

"Fooling, hey?" he said. "Well, laugh them off, kid!"

CHAPTER X.

BACK AND FORTH.

PERHAPS, after all, this brain of William Robbins had its dormant areas.

He did not seem to understand. In fact, he laughed annoyedly as he said:

"Tom—please. Cut out the nonsense this time. I've so darned many things to—"

"What d'ye mean, nonsense?" the constable rasped angrily from the corner of his mouth. "Lay off that stuff, Robbins—it's dumb and it ain't going to get you anything. Come out this way!"

"Tom," William cried desperately, "for the love of Mike, stop it! A joke's a joke, but this—this is no joke!"

"I'll say it ain't if this Ferris party don't cool down before you come up for trial. From what I hear, you'll be making little ones out of big ones quite some time when—"

"What?" said William.

And now the constable's patience was exhausted.

"You going to walk in here or get dragged in?" he demanded.

"Well, I—I—" William said dazedly as he walked in.

This was just as real as certain other horrors, too. They had passed the doorway of the basement; they were heading into the dingy little court room where, every morning, aged Silas Yates sat as magistrate and waited for business, the while entering up the day before's accounts of his little hardware store, three doors beyond.

He looked over his glasses and grunted.

"Will Robbins, hey?" he observed. "Reckless drivin', Tom?"

"Malicious mischief!" said the constable. "And petty larceny."

"Y' don't say!" observed the judge, and grew interested. "How come?"

Mr. Bemis leaned on the desk and grew bored.

"Judge Dorgan, over t' the Falls, issued the warrant on complaint of B. T. Ferris, and he sent it over to me by a boy—got me out o' bed at six this morning. Seems Robbins, here, was drunk last night, over by Garrivan's, judge, an' he took a hate on this Ferris's car an' ruined the paint and slit the tires an' stole the plugs, and I dunno what more!"

"Um!" said the judge. "Witnesses?"

"One, I understand," Bemis said unexpectedly. "Seems there was a chauffeur half asleep in one of the cars and he seen Robbins at work. Ferris has his name."

"Um!" the judge said once more. "Looks like I'd have to hold you, Robbins. You want to plead now?"

"I—well—why, I—I plead not guilty, of course," William said; and then, with a mighty effort, steadied himself.

Because, no matter what else happened, the eleven o'clock train would pull out at eleven o'clock, and on this train William was leaving Arborton.

"And I ask you to release me on my own recognizance!" he cried.

"Do what?"

"Please, Mr. Yates!"

The judge cleared his throat.

"Do you—do you think that—what he said—would be a wise thing to do, constable?" he asked.

"I never heard of it being done around here, judge," said Mr. Bemis. "No!"

"No, and I never did, either," said the judge. "I guess we can't break no fixed rules for your benefit, Will. How much was the damage, Tom?"

"Around three hundred dollars."

"Hold you in three hundred dollars bail, Robbins," said the magistrate. "That's the best I can do."

"But I can't furnish—don't you understand, I haven't time—" William cried, wildly.

"Ought to thought of that sooner, Robbins," the judge said sternly, and waved his

hand toward the sinister little door in the far corner and then returned to his books.

"Come on!" said the constable.

"Yes, but—say, I tell you I *can't* be locked up this morning! I—when can I get out? When can I be tried? When—"

"Get a jury trial next week—sessions—that's what you want, ain't it, pleading not guilty?" the judge asked impatiently. "Lock him up, Tom!"

Even then, Mr. Bemis was proceeding to do that very thing. His great fingers had gripped William's arm, sinking into the flesh; he was leading William toward the corner door. And William was walking—or drifting—or being dragged—he didn't know; he couldn't understand. It had all happened so ridiculously and he was in such dire need of his own time this morning—

Now keys had clanked and there were bars about him and evil odors. Bemis had snatched up his wrist and was fitting another key.

"Take them cuffs off you now, Robbins," he said gruffly. "Oh—you want to eat regular fare while you're here or will you send out for meals, paying for them yourself, of course?"

"What?" William gasped out insanely. "Hell! Damn food! I don't want—"

"That stuff won't get you much," the constable said contemptuously, and slammed the cell door and walked away.

He—he was there. Yes, William Robbins was in the small, but still secure, jail of Arborton.

He gripped the bars, just as he had seen other unfortunates grip the bars on one or two occasions, and gazed bewilderedly up and down the short corridor. How could he get out? Well, as a matter of fact, he couldn't get out—which was a coherent thought at least, even if it was not particularly satisfactory.

He could send for T. T. Trigg, of course, and in all probability T. T. Trigg could secure his release. That meant nothing at all except a lot of pother and recrimination that would last long past eleven o'clock. William laughed chokingly. Funny—how that cast iron determination to start after Anna on the eleven o'clock train persisted, even though he was behind the bars!

Funny how—suddenly William peered, for the door at the end of the corridor had opened and a small, slouching figure was approaching, the figure of an elderly man, hawk-nosed, bushy-browed, shabby and dirty and shrewd as a fox. It was, in fine, old Martin Kemp, one of Arborton's two legal lights, and the one of whom, so far, William had never heard a single good word.

Mr. Kemp halted before him.

"Trouble, hey?"

"Looks like it," William conceded.

"Got a lawyer?"

"No."

"I'll take your case for twenty dollars retainer."

William laughed hollowly.

"I'm not so much concerned about who takes my case as I am about how to get loose this morning. I—"

"What 'd *he* fix your bail at?" said Mr. Kemp, and jerked a thumb toward the court room. "Three hundred, I heard?"

"Yes."

"Tend to your bond for another twenty-five dollars."

"You mean, you'll get me out of this for twenty-five dollars?" William cried suddenly as his heart leaped back into action. "How soon?"

"Twenty-five plus my retainer. Matter of ten minutes, I'd say."

"Wow!" cried the prisoner, and reached into his pocket. "*Here!*"

Unhurriedly, Mr. Kemp counted the bills. He turned away without comment, then, and vanished—and William stood and fumed, standing on one foot and then upon the other, seeking every few seconds to thrust his head through the bars for a better view of the door, concluding at last that Kemp had lived up to his reputation and deserted him!

And just then the door opened, and Bemis approached once more, hat at the same angle, cigar at the same angle.

"C'm on and sign your name a couple times," he said briefly.

They were waiting for him, the judge and Mr. Kemp, the angel of light! They showed William where to sign, and William signed. Then, one arm through William's, Mr. Kemp led him straight out into the

glad, sunshiny world and freedom, and said gravely:

"Come to my office and talk this over now, Robbins. And you want to keep where I can find you, too, after we've talked and—"

"Kemp!" cried William, and was even then on tiptoe. "I'll be there—later! Just now I can't stop. Good-by!"

He was gone! Even though Mr. Kemp shouted his angry protest and commanded William to return, he was gone! Once upon a time, perchance, William had had a conscience; it slept this morning. He was on his way to the furnished room, to snatch up bag and stuff in clothes and then to flee, because the matter of his trial and liability and so on could all be settled later, when Anna had been found.

Free was William Robbins! He remained free, too, all the way up to the corner. Then:

"Well, *there* you are!" Laura said brightly, and leaned from an unfamiliar, cheap little car which she was driving herself. "Aren't you the bad boy, to run away like that?"

"I—eh?" William gasped, "—here! Let me tell you. There is something—"

"No, there isn't, Will—not till Bessie and her husband and the minister have been over," the young woman corrected. "They'll be here around three, Bess said. Now you come home with me!"

"I can't. I—"

"Listen, Will," said Laura, so quietly that William chilled. "I saw you going with Tom Bemis and I didn't like it a bit. I had to borrow this car from the lady next door—and that's not very nice in itself, after having used her telephone and everything. Will, you don't want me to make an awful scene here and scream and—and you don't want to have Mr. Trigg hear about it, either, because he was a friend of papa's and—"

So far as he was able to think at all, William thought swiftly.

Even then several of Arborton's stragglers were regarding them with curiosity. And, decidedly, William did not wish Laura to scream, because that might end almost anywhere—and wherever it ended it includ-

ed the perfect certainty that he would waste more time here than by going peacefully with Laura and breaking loose again. Breaking loose in just what way? This William did not know, of course; but the binding and gagging idea looked much more tempting than it had looked a little while ago.

So William, mastering his emotion, stepped into the little car.

"You drive home," Laura said sweetly, and nestled up to him. "I always think a man ought to drive when he's along, don't you?"

William did not answer. He merely drove, straight to the dear little home with the climbing roses and the green blinds, while Laura sat complacently, sighing happily now and then. She showed him where the car belonged in the garage next door; she thanked its owner prettily; then, stepping demurely by his side, she went with William into their home—and smiled no more.

"Will, listen," she said. "I want to talk serious to you!"

"Don't talk to me!" William snapped.

"You've ruined it!"

"What have I ruined?"

"My surprise," young Mr. Robbins said with surpassing bitterness.

"What d'you mean, surprise?"

"What do I mean—surprise!" William laughed fiercely. "Why do you suppose I rushed off like that? It was to get a wedding present for *you*!"

An instant Laura stared her justified incredulity; her lips compressed and her eyes narrowed; plainly, she was about to resent this slur upon her intelligence. But as she stared, William—and if this emergency but lasted long enough he was bound to develop into the greatest actor in all America! William laughed, turned the laugh into a half sob and also turned his head the better to conceal his feelings!

And suddenly Laura stared blankly and cried:

"Aw, gee! Aw, Will, I—I never—"

"All right. Let it go at that," sneered William. "It's no use—nothing's any use! I try to be decent and do something nice and—oh, damn the whole thing!"

He threw up both hands, despairingly.

A jerk about, and he started impulsively for the stairs and up them.

"Will! Where—where you going?" Laura faltered.

Just a second, halfway up the flight, William paused, gazed at her wildly and laughed hideously.

"Maybe I'm going to end it all!" he shouted irresponsibly. "Maybe I'm disgusted enough to—" He leaped on, upward and out of sight.

"Will! Will! Will!" Laura screamed, and thudded after him.

The little interval considered, it was almost impossibly still when Miss Deems reached the upper floor. The door of the bedroom at the side was open; from it came now a peculiar gurgling sound—and Laura shrieked afresh and made straight through this door.

And since the plunge carried her more than halfway across the room, and since William had been standing just behind the door with the key in his hand, it was a relatively simple matter, during the next three seconds, for William to step into the hall, slam the door and lock it on the outside.

Idiotic, all of it? Oh, yes, but it had worked, which rendered it a great deal less idiotic. William Robbins hesitated not for the twinkling of an eye; three bounds and he was downstairs again and heading for the back door once more.

At a rough guess, it would take Laura one full minute to comprehend—possibly more than one; and another three or four must pass before she roused the neighbors and was released. Well, that was plenty! Long before his period of grace had expired, William would be far, far away.

This time he'd work more intelligently, too. Clothes, shave, grip and everything else could go hang! William would head straight out of Arborton, going east, and keep on till he made Nelson's little garage; and there he'd hire Knute's one renting car for the day, with Knute as driver; and next, they'd keep on toward New York about as far as East Montville—and there, since even Laura would hardly be searching stations at such a distance, he'd board the train that had left Arborton at eleven. All

these things William thought as he crossed the kitchen. Then he opened the outer door—and stopped and stared.

Tom Bemis, by thunder! Bemis, in the same car, standing in the same place, looking toward him in the same way! William all but burst into cheering as he dived toward the little car; one doesn't necessarily hold a grudge against an officer of the law for doing his duty; *now* Tom was going to do him a good turn by getting him out of the neighborhood.

He leaped through the open door of the car and landed on the seat with such enthusiasm that the vehicle rocked from side to side.

"Step on her, Tom!" William cried gayly.

The constable squinted curiously at him as they rolled away.

"Seem to sorter know when I'm around, don't you?" he observed.

"Yep!"

The constable squinted more curiously.

"Sound almost as if you liked to ride with me?"

"I do this time," William laughed, as they sped along.

"Smatter? Ain't your home life happy?"

"It could be happier," the remarkable William responded, with another outburst of gayety. "It—here! I'm not going that way. If you're going to the Hall, I'll hop off here and—"

"Try it!" said Mr. Bemis, and his dreadful right hand clutched William's wrist and he turned down the block toward the Town Hall.

"But—but—"

Now Mr. Bemis's left hand switched to William, while the intelligent little car steered itself for a moment. There was an impressive click, and Mr. Bemis grunted:

"Them cuffs'll get to know you after awhile!"

"Well, but—here! I'm not under arrest still, you nut!" Mr. Robbins cried. "I'm out on bail—"

"Not on this charge, you ain't," the constable explained, as he stopped his car. "Come on, Robbins, and don't try no tricks!"

He clutched the arm and William fol-

lowed, muttering, through the side door of the basement, back into the little court room. The magistrate looked up and nodded.

"Might better 'a' stayed around a minute before," he said. "Reamer was in after his warrant not two minutes after you'd left. I had t' issue it, you know."

"Reamer?"

"Grand larceny of one taxicab, Robbins."

"But his damned cab's right up the road," William shouted. "He can get it—"

"No profanity in this court, young fellow!" cried the judge, and hammered the desk with his fist. "He's got it now. That don't alter the original offense, Robbins. You willfully and maliciously appropriated this car to your own uses and kept same all night, Reamer having spent most of the night looking for you, I take it, and being pretty sore as a consequence. You want to plead on this charge, Robbins?"

"Yes! Not guilty! And—"

The judge yawned and scratched his head with his pen.

"Held f' trial," he muttered. "Reamer wanted me to say at least a thousand dollars bail. I'll make it three hundred. Put him in a cell, Tom."

William laughed wildly.

"Hold on!" he cried. "This charge is all rot, you know, and—"

"Come on! Come on!" said the constable impatiently.

The corner door opened once more; once more William passed through, muttering his wrath. Once more, too, his handcuffs were removed and William Robbins heard the clang of his cell door.

"Get me Kemp!" he roared.

The constable looked at him coldly.

"That'll be about all from you, Robbins," he said. "I don't take no orders from crooks. If I see the counselor and happen to think of it, I'll mention you. Otherwise not."

He adjusted his hat and strolled away down the corridor. Young Mr. Robbins, groaning, whining, shook the bars in helpless fury—but very shortly indeed he found himself cooling with unpleasant rapidity.

He was in jail again—this time for Heaven alone knew how long. Not so very long, perhaps, because the elderly buzzard, Mr. Kemp, was known to frequent spots where dollars lurked, and of these there were still a few in William's pocket; but long enough for Laura to free herself with William still in town and—well, where *was* Kemp? Twenty minutes had passed, with never a sign of him. William sat down on the stool in the corner, and shut his teeth and clasped his hands. He would be calm!

So was William seated as the clock far overhead boomed out the hour of ten!

It cannot be said that he was still calm or that he had remained seated throughout this long interval. He had, in fact, been up and down not less than fifty times, each time hurrying to the front of his cell and gripping the bars and looking down the corridor, each time with agitation a little more pronounced.

Why, they'd simply left him here to rot! And perhaps it was his own fault; perhaps a gentle word to the important Mr. Bemis would have turned the trick in a minute or two, where a barked order had—well, praises be! Here came Kemp at last!

He was the same dirty, slinking, unperturbed old man. He looked dryly at William.

"More trouble, hey?"

"Yes! Reamer had me arrested for—"

"I heard about it. Want to retain me for this case?"

"I—yes! How much?"

"Um—well, retainer 'll be the same—twenty dollars, of course. About the bond, I dunno. Man pinched twice in an hour ain't so good a risk, Robbins. Lemme see. Gimme thirty-five dollars and I'll fix up your bond. That's fifty-five, all told."

William did not argue. William passed the money through the bars and Kemp departed. And now, again, Bemis was releasing him—and he was signing his name—and he was issuing forth again with his attorney!

"Now this time, young feller—" Mr. Kemp began sternly.

"Some other time!" the strange young man corrected, and raced headlong away!

He was making for the railway station! He knew Briggs, the express agent down there, and Briggs would hide him until train time and then, if need be, put him aboard in a wooden box! Briggs was that kind of a sport and William was almighty sorry now that he had not thought of Briggs on the former occasion, because had he gone down this way he would never have met Laura and been forced—

"Will!" Laura cried sharply, as her borrowed car glided past him and stopped—as, in fact, Miss Deems reached out and caught William's arm with a grip that made Mr. Bemis's seem weak and effeminate.

"Ugh?" choked William, as he stopped.

"Will, ain't you the limit!" Miss Deems cried. She did not smile. "To do a thing like that to me!"

"I—I was just fooling!" William panted. "Now *you* listen! I'm not going back with you! No! Not if you screech your infernal head off and get the whole population around us! I'm going to—to attend to some business. Let go!"

He glared at the lady then. He was fully prepared to have her begin her threatened screaming and to deal with it as best might be; and yet she did not begin at all. Laura only smiled down on him as a mother might smile at a naughty child.

"Ain't you the silliest thing!" she sighed. "With him waiting home for you and everything!"

"Who?"

"Mr. Trigg!"

"Waiting where?"

"At *our* home, of course, Will," Laura smiled. "I asked him to lunch, and I don't know how I can get that, trying to find you this last half hour."

"Well, you tell Trigg—"

"And he was going to surprise you," Miss Deems went on annoyed, "and now you're trying to cut off your nose to spite your face and I'll have to tell you and spoil it. Listen, Will. He changed his mind about your money!"

"Hey?"

"Certainly he did. He said after all you was your own boss and he come up to the house with a certified check for twenty-five thousand dollars. We were going to hide

it in a roll and make sure you got the roll and—oh, go on and do what you like, you poor simp!" Miss Deems cried, in sudden petulance, and released William and pushed him away. "You ain't got brains enough to handle money if you had it!"

"Laura!" William cried hoarsely. "Is this on the level?"

"Stay away and find out!" Laura snapped.

"Let's get home, quick!" puffed young Mr. Robbins, as he climbed in. "Here, I'll drive! I can make better time!"

Wonderful time William made, too. Little children fled screaming from his path, as he headed uptown through Arborton; several men shouted at him; several dogs rushed out and barked after him. William, since he had hit nothing, did not heed.

For the check was certified! And there was still time to get that check from T. T. Trigg and make the train!

William stopped before the little house with a murderous grinding of sliding tires. Breathing hard, he leaped down and crashed into the dwelling itself; and there William looked about swiftly and looked and looked again. There was only Laura, who had entered after and now was carefully closing the door.

"Where's Trigg?" William demanded.

Laura shrugged unconcernedly.

"I couldn't say," she answered, locking the door and dropping the key into her pocket. "At his office, I suppose."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST FEW MINUTES.

THERE was a space, of course, wherein William's head spun.

"You needn't look at the kitchen door," Miss Deems said pointedly. "That's locked, too, and I got the key in my pocket!"

"W-what?"

"I'll say I have!" Laura said comfortably, and settled herself heavily in one of the big chairs. "And what's more, I found out the gentleman next door is a night watchman and we woke him up with your racket, and he's sore, not being able ever

to get to sleep again once he wakes up, so his wife says. He told me if I had any more trouble with you to shout and he'd come over and punch your head."

This dread possibility William ignored altogether.

"You were lying about Trigg?" he gasped out.

"Why not?" asked Laura, and shrugged again. "If you lie to me all the time, why shouldn't I lie to you? I think a man and his wife has a right to do just what each other does, don't you?"

"Well, by the—"

"Listen, Will! Don't you start any of your yelling!" Miss Deems continued, and it was suddenly apparent even to the fevered William that the lady's patience had become exhausted and that she was about to establish herself as mistress of the family. "You and me are going to have a nice long talk, and then we'll understand each other better. I've done everything a nice girl could do to—to have things right. I'll leave it to anybody if I haven't. But there's some limit to what a girl like me has to do, Will Robbins! It's a crying shame and a disgrace, the way I have to chase after you; it ain't my place at all and it ain't necessary under the law!"

"What?" William said thickly.

"No, it ain't. This gentleman next door is a deputy sheriff and he knows. He told me if I wanted you arrested any time he'd be glad to attend to it for me; and what's more, Will Robbins, he said he'd put you some place where you wouldn't work any pull with that pal of yours, Tom Bemis.

"And I think that's a shame, too—a constable like him hanging around to get you away. I think something could be done to him for that; I'm going to ask Mr. Trigg about it. Oh, now—now! Don't think I didn't see him from the window upstairs. I saw him the first time, for that matter."

Yes, she was angry. William, almost at the surface again, observed her carefully. She was angry enough to shriek and bring in the man next door—and that meant delay. In fact, she was angry enough now to do almost anything.

William, with a shrug of his own,

thudded into the chair opposite Miss Deems and laughed harshly. The really resourceful, characterful man, once dedicated to a proposition, merely goes on and on. Well, William still meant to catch that eleven o'clock train, and he had lots and lots of character.

"Go on and talk—talk your head off!" he said. "I've got nothing to say."

"I guess you have got nothing to say! I guess—"

"I'd made up my mind to buy you something nice for a wedding surprise, even if I had to fight you tooth and nail to get it. You couldn't see it, could you? No! Sure you couldn't! You had such a job catching a man that when you got one you had to knock him down and sit on him for fear he'd get away!"

"Say, Will Robbins! You listen!" Laura vociferated. "I'll have you understand that a lot of better men than you ever thought of being have wanted—"

"Aw, tell that t' Sweeny!" said young Mr. Robbins, from the downdrawn corner of his mouth.

"Why, Will Robbins!"

"I said it!" William said disgustedly. "I said it!"

This, he fancied, was just about the tempo of a family fight in Laura's circle. He had made a wonderfully accurate guess, too, he noted with delight. Laura, addressed in language which she could instantly comprehend, was responding beautifully; her rage was disappearing and her eyes filling.

"You listen here, Will Robbins! I—"

"I don't have to listen; I'm sick of hearing you talk! I try to do something nice—and then what? You're going to have some fathead that lives next door pinch me! Aaaah!" said William Robbins. "You make me sick!"

"Will, it ain't—"

"I say it is!" William corrected savagely. "Some wedding we'll have—no presents, no nothing. Just because you're a nut!"

"Will, I don't think that's nice!" Miss Deems said.

William laughed again and stretched out his legs.

"Think what you like! What do I care what you think?" he asked politely.

Now Miss Deems shut her lips tightly. A little time she sought to move William by reproachful glances. These failed. William, the corners of his mouth dragged down, merely sat and sneered. Presently Miss Deems smiled and spoke softly:

"Will."

"What d'ye want?" rasped William.

"What were you going to buy me?"

"Go ask this guy next door!"

"What—what does he know about it?"

"All you'll ever know, believe me!" said the offended young man.

"Aw, Will!" Laura teased.

"Nothin' doin'—you'll never know," William barked, and hitched about in his chair. "Wotta we got for lunch?"

Laura choked suddenly.

"We got creamed salmon, if I ever get a chance to make it," she said, "and asparagus and—"

"Well, get busy and stir it up, kid!" snapped Mr. Robbins. "I had no breakfast. I can't live on air."

"Come—come help he," Laura said.

"Do what?"

"Yes, we can—"

William waved his outstretched hand emphatically.

"Not in a million years!" he cried, with a short, derisive laugh. "Do you think you've got one of these guys that washes and wipes the dishes for his little sweetie? Well, if that's what you want, kid, change your mind before your cousin gets here with the sky pilot—*because that ain't me!*"

"Why, Will, I only thought—"

"All right, your apology's accepted, only don't get that idea into your head again. Listen, Laura! I'm going upstairs and scrub some of the dirt off my hands and face. Come on."

"What for?"

"You got me so fond of being watched now, I insist on being watched!" William smiled bitterly. "Come on. Bring a chair!"

"Now, Will, I don't think that's—"

"Come on!" yelled the apparently infuriated young man. "Bring a rope, so you can tie it around me and hold the end,

in case you turned your head away a second. D'ye hear me? *Come!*"

"Will Robbins, I won't do it!" Miss Deems cried, and flounced angrily into the kitchen.

Did William instantly rush upstairs? By no manner of means! Each minute of this astounding day, William was learning. So now he stood for a little and mumbled curses and unflattering comments in the most natural way.

He even went to the kitchen door and shouted a taunt or two at Laura for good measure; the young woman tossed her head and refused either to answer or to turn toward him.

See, too, how thoroughly William was learning! Upstairs, he turned on water, which splashed noisily. A minute or more and he moved to the stairhead and bawled:

"Hey, Laura! Will I use these towels in the cabinet? They look clean. Come up and see."

"I will not!" Laura called back. "Use what you like!"

"Aaaaah!" William sent down through the house.

Then, as lightning flashes, the Apache effect was on him once more!

This bathroom, with its fine, wide window, had been placed by some super-intellect at the front of the house and screened from the home next door by a large, projecting dormer. William laid hold upon the lower sash; it slid up without a single squeak. Then, giving not so much as one fearful downward glance, making not even the roughest estimate of the distance to the ground, young Mr. Robbins laid his hand upon the sill and vaulted outward.

And landed squarely upon his feet and, even as he landed, was running toward the side street!

And stopped short and suddenly grasped his head with both hands, did William, and screamed faintly. Thomas Bemis, constable, was in the very same spot, in the very same car, beckoning!

An instant, William would have fled. Another, and he abandoned the absurd notion. Bemis, armed and in a car, must have had him before he could cover half a square. Although, perhaps, this time Bem-

is, who could not possibly be hunting William again, was really a Godsend? The fact that William wished to run away from him was, in itself, almost proof of that.

With a laugh, William dived at the car—dived through the open door—dived almost into Bemis's lap. Then the handcuffs snapped upon his wrists and the car started.

"Well, say—hey!—look here—" William chattered breathlessly. "What—"

"Much obliged to you for having the homing instinct like a cat or a pigeon; makes it easy to find you, Robbins," said the constable, as he opened his throttle wide. "But this time I'm warning you not to talk. Anything you say now will be used against you later."

"What?"

"You'd 'a' done a darned sight better t' stick to wreckin' and stealin' cars, I can tell you!" the constable said grimly. "Say nothin', Robbins."

"Well, but—"

"Robbins, shut up! You're in bad this time!" said Mr. Bemis, and whirled down toward the City Hall.

Overhead, the clock boomed just once. William's wild gaze shot upward; it was half past ten now!

Bemis was gripping his arm again; William followed mechanically through the door, into the basement, into the court room. Dizzily, he noted that the judge was frowning and shaking his head.

"Got him, did you, Tom?" he said gravely.

"What I go after, I come back with," the constable responded, succinctly.

He was shuffling a number of folded papers now. William stared at them numbly. There had been only a single paper for each of his other arrests, he recalled; here was a collection and Bemis was passing them over.

"There they are, judge, just as they come over from Montville," he said. "Warrant—copy of the complaint—three supporting affidavits."

"Well, what is the charge?" William cried.

The magistrate looked at him sadly and cleared his throat.

"It's pretty serious this time, young fel-

ler," he said. "It's assault with intent to kill!"

"Hey?"

"Yep! John Patterson Bullard, Robbins. He—or his lawyer or friends or somebody—got this warrant issued in Montville this morning, and it was here five minutes after you'd left. I guess you better stay in jail this time, Robbins. Makes too much running for Tom!"

"Well, I'm not staying, nevertheless!" William shouted. "What's the bail this time and where's my lawyer? Where's Kemp?"

The constable shook his head.

"The judge can't fix no bail for you on this charge, Robbins," he said. "It's my duty in a case like this to ask that you be held to await the result of Mr. Bullard's injuries."

"Yep—that's right, Tom," said the magistrate. "Anyhow, the acting district attorney telephoned over from Montville that most likely he'd want this man held for the Grand Jury. He said he'd have the papers over here some time this afternoon. No bail, Robbins."

"But I tell you I have to have bail! Judge! This is all nonsense—all these charges. And I'll be back whenever you say for trial and bring a couple of real lawyers from the city and all that. But this morning, I have to—"

The law shook its head implacably.

"Held without bail!" it intoned, in a deep, bass voice now.

"Oh—damn your 'held without bail!'" young Mr. Robbins shouted. "You can't—"

"Lock him up, Tom!" said the judge.

"You'll have some job doing it this time!" William cried wildly, unguardedly. "I've—"

"Oh! Is zat so?" snorted Mr. Bemis.

Something happened just then. It was William's impression that some two or three dozen hands had seized him, all at once—they were shaking the very life out of him—that his coat had split and his collar had been torn loose from the front button.

He sought to draw back his reliable right for a blow; the left, being quite securely fastened to it, also came back and the jerk

was near to upsetting William. Then the hands devoted themselves to propelling him toward the corner door!

And there was a scuffle along concrete floor and a clang. William was back in his dear, familiar old cell and Mr. Bemis, quite ruffled, was dusting off his hands.

"'Nother time, maybe you'll know enough t' walk of your own accord!" he said.

"Well—well—here! Take these things off!" William panted.

"Stick 'em through the bars."

William stuck them and found his hands free. William, whose memory was excellent, lowered his breathless voice to a dulcet undertone.

"Bemis, will you please—*please* see if Kemp's about?" he asked. "And I beg your pardon for struggling, Bemis. I'm very sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," smiled the constable. "You never stood no chance with *me*, Robbins, cuffs or no cuffs. I'll see if old Kemp's around anywhere, but it won't do you any good. You can't get loose on a charge like this—not, anyway, till we see if the man dies."

"Is—is he really in danger of that?"

"I dunno a thing about it," said the constable, as he strolled away.

Minutes tore wildly along, then, as William stood and stared fascinatedly at his watch. It was ten thirty-five. Now it was ten thirty-eight. Now it was ten forty, flat. Now—

The door at the end of the corridor opened and Kemp came down, smiling oddly.

"Looks like your bad day, Robbins!" he observed.

"Kemp! What can you—"

"You want to retain me in this case, too?"

"Yes, if—"

"Well, this is a different matter altogether," smiled the aged attorney. "This'll cost you one hundred dollars!"

"But I haven't got that much!"

"Huh?" Kemp said sharply. "How much you got?"

William counted rapidly.

"Exactly eighty-seven dollars, but—"

"Hand it here!"

"But I have to—"

"Stay in jail, then," said his attorney, and turned away.

"No! *Here!*" cried William.

The lawyer checked the money over carefully and put it in an inner pocket.

"Bemis gave me the key, to come get you," he explained, with another of his peculiar grins. "I been looking over the papers they handed that hick judge in Montville, Robbins. Come along."

"Aren't they all right?" William cried.

"Let's see what our local judge has t' say about 'em."

The magistrate really did not seem quite perturbed as William, even again, halted before him. He shot a somewhat frightened glance at Mr. Kemp, too, and cleared his throat.

"Um—ah—Robbins," said he. "The counselor here's been calling my attention to these papers that come over from Montville. Seems they's a couple o' flaws in this here complaint—I'd 'a' seen 'em myself if I'd looked it over careful, of course—and two of these three affidavits ain't executed proper. Then it seems that even the warrant ain't in proper form and—"

"I told him," Mr. Kemp put in keenly, "that if he held you on any such ridiculous legal jumble as this, you'd bring suit for damages against him personally and take steps to have him removed from office!"

"Of—of course!" said William.

"Well, you can't intimidate this court by any such means as that," the magistrate stated, loudly. "Same time, now that I've glanced over the papers, Robbins, I refuse to hold you on the strength of them. They'll have to be straightened out and you'll have to be arrested again. Present state o' things, you're discharged from custody!"

"Hooray!" cried William Robbins.

Kemp laid upon him now a hand as firm as Bemis's own, and led him again to sunlit freedom.

"This time, young feller," he said, "you're not going to run away. We'll go to my office."

William smiled and cast one glance upward. It was now exactly fourteen minutes of eleven. William nodded assent.

"Do you mind if I go down alone and see Reamer and explain matters and get him to withdraw his charge, first? I won't be more than half an hour—and of course, whatever your fee would have been for the trial, I'll pay when we come to settle up."

"Oh—"

"Kemp," William said earnestly, "I'd like to have that cleared up, because Reamer's been a good friend and I hate to think that I got him mad enough to have me arrested, you know. And—psst, Kemp!"

"Huh?"

"See that car up at the far corner, with the big girl in it?"

"Yeah—know her. She's a waitress."

"Well, she's my wife now," said William, with a grin, and she's so sore at Reamer she wants me to fight him to a finish. You go up and take her to your office and I'll be there in—yes, in twenty minutes. If Reamer's not in his office, I won't wait."

"Say, is this straight goods you're giving me or isn't it?" the attorney inquired, and shot his penetrating gaze right through William—and in a moment knew that it was all quite, quite straight. That smile of William's belonged on no adult countenance, so open, so charmingly frank and honest it was! Rather did it belong upon a splendid little boy—a boy hardly more than a baby! Kemp grunted.

"All right!" he said.

"And Kemp!" William giggled suddenly.

"What?"

"You take Laura to your office and cool her down; don't mention Reamer unless she does, but just soothe her and tell her I'll be there in half an hour, sure. And I may as well tell you, Mr. Kemp—you see, I've never been mixed up in anything like this before and I don't know what it costs—but Laura thinks a lot of me, and her brother sold off the six cows they owned jointly, yesterday, and my little girl's got about three hundred in cash in her pocket."

A pleasant shock seemed to run through the good counselor. His eye brightened.

"Y' don't say!" he said, as he started up the block. "Fine! Don't kill yourself hurrying back, Robbins!"

"I won't!" laughed William.

He came near to choking, too; for once,

he had told the truth! He sped around the far side of the Town Hall, still unperceived by Laura Deems. He sped on.

Lies! Lies! Lies! Why, they seemed fairly to be oozing from him—they seemed to be dripping from his very clothes. Well, let them ooze and let them drip, for they had saved the day and at last William Robbins was on his way to the eleven o'clock train with a clear path ahead!

And, of course, he was penniless but for a small handful of silver in his trousers pocket! Three steps, this cheerful bit of realization caused William to slow his swift pace; but the next three were enough faster to make up for them. To some extent, money had ceased to matter.

There was always Briggs and, if he knew Briggs, a trip to the city in the baggage car could be arranged. Once in New York, a nickel spent in telephoning any one of a dozen friends would find him in cash enough for all immediate needs. William even laughed; *his feet were upon the platform of Arborton's railway station!*

The astounding thing, it seemed to him, was that the station did not instantly explode and hurl him back to his cell below the Town Hall. He looked around, incredulously; but Laura was nowhere in sight and Tom Bemis was not beckoning. In fact, nobody was paying the slightest attention to the rather disheveled and breathless William.

Briggs, out in the express room, grinned up at him from his desk.

"Smatter? Scrap, Bill?" he asked.

"Little one," said William, with an amusing grin. "Say, Briggs, I'm broke!"

"Gwan!"

"Fact, and I have to go down on this next train, just as privately as possible. I don't want any one to know I've gone, for a couple of days at least. Can you fix it for me to ride down with the baggage or the express?"

"Why, sure, Bill," said Mr. Briggs. "And here, take this five-spot, anyway."

And he arose and thrust it upon William and glanced down the track.

"Here she comes!" he said, and little realized how these three words rocked William Robbins. "You stick here for a min-

ute, kid, and then just walk forward quietly. I'll fix it with Henderson so's they'll drop you behind a box and forget about you."

He sauntered away. William's eyes literally filled with tears. If, some day, he should reach heaven, he knew that the higher-class angels would look just like freckled Jimmy Briggs! Now Briggs was talking to the men in the baggage car; people were getting aboard, too, and it was almighty near time for the train to leave. William grinned nervously, eyes fixed on Mr. Briggs.

And then Briggs turned and nodded swiftly! And William, quite forgetting his orders, dashed suddenly toward the haven on wheels.

Would it not be delightful to relate how, without mishap, William gained the baggage car, was secreted therein and rode to New York and his incomparable little Anna? It would indeed—but this was not William's day for delightful things.

He had, in fact, managed no more than two great leaps, when he stopped so suddenly that his very teeth clattered together!

A mighty wrench, and he freed himself from the grip that had fastened on his left arm; and at once the grip was restored and William, permanently, halted his flight, gasping!

His wild eyes fastened then upon—Bemis!

"You're not taking that train, buddy!" the constable informed him.

"Bemis!" William gasped. "Tom—please! Just this once, lemme go! I never did a thing and I'll—I'll come back and—"

"Nothing doin', Robbins," the constable said firmly, and caught the other arm.

"Yes, but—" William whined.

Foggily, he knew that the engine bell was ringing, the locomotive giving out great snorts, the couplings clanking. Why, yes, the wheels were turning, more and more rapidly, and car after car was passing William, on their way to the city, without him.

Now the last coach rattled by, with a brakeman on the rear platform. Now platform, train and all vanished around the curve!

And William Robbins, husband of Anna, the missing, was still in Arborton.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



RAIN

I LOVE to watch the raindrops as they fall
Obliquely to the ground,
Or hang in tiny globules from each bush
All shimmering, pale and round.

I love to watch the puddles as they fill
With each recurring splash,
An ever widening circle ripples out—
A momentary flash.

I love to hear the rain drip through the leaves
And sigh and sigh and seep,
Like tears held back a moment—and as sure
A-down the face to creep.

I love to hear the rain fall on my roof
In rhythmic dull tattoo,
It soothes my worn and weary soul to sleep
As magic potions do.

Lulu Minerva Schultz.



Mr. Skinner Spends a Dollar

By JACK BECHDOLT

ON an empty road in a backwater of the Connecticut hills a young man and a pretty girl sat bolt upright in the front seat of a rusted, worn-out, mud-covered automobile which was incapable of going anywhere. They were staring bitterly at nothing.

The road was part of a main trunk highway between salt water and the Berkshires. The time was a fine morning of late summer, such a day as should see that paved way swarming with tourists. But for five miles on either side of Melton Corners the landscape was as quiet and the air as free of carbon monoxide gas as it was before Henry Ford bought his first monkey wrench.

Roadhouses were locked and boarded up, hot dog stands stood empty and tenantless, gas pumps rusted under lock and key. On other roads wheels whirled, engines purred and sirens honked, but on this one a blight had fallen. State engineers had dammed and diverted the stream of traffic with a barrier at the forks that announced: "This Road Under Repair. Detour."

If you dam the bed of a busy mountain torrent and divert its flow, a horde of poor fish have to move on to other waters or are doomed to linger in the shallow pools, gasping their last as a merciless sun deprives them of sustenance. When the State engineers dammed the ten-mile stretch of highway that passed through Melton Corners, Barney Murphy was one of the poor fish that was left to gasp his last.

Barney was of the species known as suckers.

It was Barney who sat in the car beside the girl.

Barney was tall and had a wild shock of yellow hair. He wore spectacles, and the habitual expression on his face was one of mild puzzlement.

Most of the time Barney was covered with a brown denim overall and could be found underneath an automobile, smeared with dust and grease and perfectly happy over some problem in mechanics. At this moment he sat in the junked car, his elbows on the steering wheel, his head cupped in his hands. His mouth was pressed into

a thin, bitter line, and his mild blue eyes blinked at a future that was dirtier than the oil-soaked ground around him.

The car, which lacked rear wheels, had been propped up on a carpenter's horse in front of a small brick garage that was painted a bright blue. The name on the sign was "Square Deal Garage, Barney Murphy, Prop." Below was tacked another sign, a home-made one, that said: "This Business for Sale, Cheap."

Nell Corey sat stiffly beside Barney, her snapping black eyes fixed on the idle perspective of road. She was a slight little thing, a head shorter than Barney, black-haired, red cheeked, dressed in cheap calico that she contrived to make very smart.

Nell Corey was directly responsible for Barney Murphy's owning a useless garage on an idle road—and she knew it. Barney had come out from the city where he had been a mechanic on good wages. He came to look at the Square Deal Garage, offered for sale by Martin Skinner, the village capitalist.

As Barney told Nell afterward in a burst of confidence, he had decided against buying, when there passed down the busy highway a village beauty in calico. The girl stopped to exchange a word with Mr. Skinner, was introduced to Barney Murphy and smiled at him. That smile fixed Barney.

He signed a bill of sale and Skinner's notes on the spot. He was anchored in Melton Corners for life, if that was where Nell preferred to live.

Barney crumpled up a letter he had just opened. "I guess this is the end all right," he remarked. "Might as well close the place up."

"Think, Barney!" Nell cried. "Isn't there any other place you can get the money? There must be—"

"Think! Don't you suppose I have thought? A thousand bucks is a lot of money. And Joe Haley's the only fellow I know that's got that much to lend. If he says nothing doing—"

"But it's only for three months! Inside of three months the new road will be finished and this business will earn a thousand dollars a month. Look what it did before they closed the road."

"Joe says nothing doing." Barney didn't add that Joe Haley had written more to the effect that if Barney hadn't fallen for a fool girl he wouldn't be broke and in the fix he now was.

That remark of Joe's hurt a lot. And yet Barney knew that if it hadn't been for Nell, at least he would have investigated a little more before he bought the Square Deal.

Barney wouldn't dream of telling Nell such a thing, yet Nell knew it, and knew that Barney knew it. The knowledge was a dread specter that stood between them.

"I thought Joe Haley was your friend!" Nell cried bitterly. "A fine kind of pal he is—"

"Aw, now, honey," Barney blinked rapidly. "Aw, old Joe's all right! Sure! But he's gotta be hard-boiled about money. He wouldn't never have got a thousand dollars if he wasn't hard-boiled. I don't blame Joe."

"You! You wouldn't blame anybody. You're so easy. You wouldn't even blame Martin Skinner for swindling you out of every cent you had!"

"Aw, well, now, Skinner—I guess Skinner didn't mean to exactly *swindle* me, honey."

"Didn't mean to swindle you!" Nell's eyes snapped. "He did. And I told him so to his face—last night—right in the post office."

Barney uttered a distressed cry. "No? Nell, you wouldn't say a thing like that—"

"I'll tell you what I said. Skinner said 'Good evening' to me, and I said to him, 'You needn't expect any "Good evening" from me, Mr. Skinner. A man that would do what you did to Barney Murphy. When you sold him that Square Deal Garage you had inside information that the State Road was going to be closed for repairs. You deliberately arranged the deferred payment so the money would fall due when there wasn't any business and Barney couldn't possibly pay it. All the time you planned to get the garage back on a mortgage so you can sell it all over again as soon as the road is open. I don't know what you call it, but I call that deliberate swindling.'"

Nell's eyes were snapping and she was breathing hard as she rehearsed the scene. Barney listened aghast.

"Now, honey," he protested anxiously, "you—you oughtn't to go talk like that to Martin Skinner."

"Is it the truth?" Nell demanded.

"Well, now, of course the way I might look at it you could say it was the truth."

"Well, it is the truth. Martin Skinner swindled you, and he means to take the garage back and sell it again and make another profit. If you won't tell him that to his face, I'm glad I did. Somebody's got to do something about it. Barney Murphy, it's just about time you got a little hard-boiled yourself—if it isn't already too late."

"I guess it is too late," Barney murmured, ashamed. "I guess I was a sucker, all right—letting Skinner put it over on me. I guess I *always* was a sucker—and always will be! I guess the best thing I can do is forget I ever wanted to own a garage and go back to town and work in the shops."

"Then we'll never get married," Nell said bitterly.

"No—I suppose that's right. You would not want to marry a—an easy mark—a fall guy like me."

"I would not!"

"Well!" Barney rose with a sigh. "I might's well begin closing up. No use sticking around for my own funeral—"

"Barney!" Nell's interruption halted him as her hand clutched his sleeve. "Look—that's Martin Skinner coming down the road! And he's coming here. He's passed the fork. And he's actually hurrying. Barney, maybe he's going to do something to you—after what I said last night. He might have got mad—he might try to get even. If he did anything to you, I'd never forgive myself."

Barney quieted her with a touch. His manner was calm but suddenly resolute. "Skinner won't do anything to me—or you, either. Stay right where you are while I talk to him."

Barney's sudden firmness brought a quick, appraising glance from Nell. Barney wasn't afraid of Skinner or anybody else.

Physically and morally Barney had plenty of courage. All that ailed Barney was that he would believe what men like Skinner told him. He would trust anybody.

Barney wasn't a business man. He was a good mechanic and thoroughly happy only when he was underneath a car with a wrench in his hand and grease all over him.

Nell had sense enough to love Barney for what he was. But she realized he was going to need an awful lot of looking after. She stared at the approaching Martin Skinner.

Skinner was the capitalist of Melton Corners. He owned various property along the State Highway, including the Square Deal Garage which Barney had bought but had not completely paid for. Skinner was notorious for his sharp dealing and his miserliness.

The house he lived in hadn't been painted since McKinley's first term. The coat he wore was a swallow tail his grandfather bought to get married in. The newest thing about his wardrobe was his straw hat, and that had been old when "After the Ball" was the song hit of the year.

Not even Melton Corners gossip could keep track of all the business enterprises engineered by Martin Skinner.

Melton Corners's richest man was long and lean and his brown face looked not unlike the shell of a butternut. At sight of Barney and Nell Corey that face underwent a strange and painful contortion. Martin Skinner smiled.

Nell stiffened like an alert watchdog. When Skinner smiled it was time for honest folks to hide their valuables.

"Mornin', Nellie. Mornin', Barney."

"Yes" said Barney stiffly.

"Guess you got time for a minute's talk, Barney? Heh-heh-heh!" Skinner cackled at his little joke and rubbed his hands, which were dry and rasped like dead leaves.

"I guess it's your fault if he's got time, instead of being over his head in work and making honest money," said Nell.

"I was talkin' to Barney, young woman. How about it? Got time to listen to business, Barney?"

"If it's about foreclosing your mortgage—" Barney began.

"Well, 'tain't. I stopped by in a neighborly spirit, thinkin' mebbe you'd like to earn a dollar while business is slack." Skinner's bright eyes searched Barney's face.

Nell smiled bitterly. "Hm! Who do you want murdered, Martin Skinner?"

"Now, honey," Barney remonstrated, "Mr. Skinner's talking business. Yeah, sure, I'd like to make a dollar, Mr. Skinner. But it can't be a repair job, because you don't own a car—or maybe you bought one?"

"Buy a car? I did not! Catch me takin' fool chances with my money, young man. No, sir, this is another matter entirely. Really, it ain't worth a dollar. 'Tain't worth anythin', to be exact."

"He offered you a dollar," Nell said sharply. "Don't let him talk you out of it, Barney."

Martin Skinner gave Nell a look sharp with disgust. "I'll attend to this, thank you. Barney, you know where my house is?"

"Yeah, sure I do."

"You know they's two roads leads there? The one by Wilkinson's is shorter by ten minutes?"

Barney looked puzzled. "Sure, I know that, Mr. Skinner."

"All right. Don't forget it. I'm expectin' a party on business. On account of the road bein' closed, I couldn't phone him exact directions to find me, so I told him to ask his way to your garage. He'll come in a big closed automobile and he'll ask you where I live."

"All right; I'll tell him."

"Yep, you tell him; but here's what I'm payin' you a dollar to remember: you tell him to take the long road around. Can you remember that?"

"I can, Mr. Skinner."

"And the minute he starts I want you to get on the phone and give me notice he's comin'. Don't lose any time about it. That's all you've got to do—and here's your dollar."

"Looks like an easy way to earn a dollar," Barney grinned.

"Easiest dollar you ever earned," Skinner grunted. He was writing in a long blank book he had taken from his pocket.

"There's a catch in that somewhere," Nell sniffed.

"There you are," said Skinner. He handed Barney a slip of paper. Barney looked at the paper, and his mouth opened. Nell took it from his fingers.

"That's not a dollar!" she cried.

"It's a receipt for a dollar, ain't it? Barney owes me a thousand dollars on this business. He can apply that on account." The business genius of Melton Corners paused to shake an admonitory finger. "And you remember, Barney, do just what I tell you. I'm trustin' a lot to you, payin' you in advance like this."

Barney stared doubtfully at his receipt while Martin Skinner's figure vanished down the road.

"Gosh," he sighed—"all I need is nine hundred and ninety-nine more like this, and I'd own this garage and we could get married."

Nell didn't heed this speculation. She was deep in speculations of her own.

"Martin Skinner spend a dollar?" she exclaimed. "A dollar just to have you tell somebody how to find his house—"

"Well, I gotta telephone him, too, Nell."

"Humph. He never gave a dollar for a thing like that in his life. If he's not going crazy, he's up to something deep. When he spends a dollar he expects a hundred back."

II.

A MIDDLE-AGED woman, in widow's black, warm and breathless with hurry, turned in off the road.

"Oh, Mr. Murphy, have you seen Martin Skinner?"

"Yes, ma'am; but he's gone on home, Mrs. Harris."

Mrs. Harris sank to rest on the running board of the junked car and wiped her face.

"Bother the man! I've walked four miles, chasing him. I was at his house, then down to the Corners, then back up here. But I know what ails him. He prom-

ised me five dollars, and he don't *want* to see me!"

"Promised you five dollars!" Nell gasped. "Martin Skinner is going crazy!"

"No, he isn't, either. But he knows a bargain when he sees one; only he's so darn cautious he hates to let go of the money. And I've got to have it, before noon, too. Nell, my daughter down at New Haven is down sick, and I've got to go see her. I need that five dollars, or I can't go—"

"Oh, isn't that a shame? Is she bad?"

"Yes, she is. And she needs me to look after her house and children. I don't know what's going to happen to them all if I don't take hold right off."

Barney had a thin billfold out of his pocket and investigated its contents warily. There was just five dollars in it.

"You take it, Mrs. Harris," he urged. "And don't worry. You can pay me when Skinner pays you."

"But I don't want to borrow. Our folks never borrowed money. I'll tell you what I will do. Now, listen, Mr. Murphy. Martin Skinner offered me five dollars for a little old glass plate we've had in our family for a long time. It's a plate Grandma Harris owned when she was a girl. What they call Sandwich glass. And I've been told that plate's worth as much as twenty-five dollars because it's rare.

"I've been dickering with Martin Skinner about it for two years, and five dollars is the best he would offer. When I got the telegram yesterday and had to have the money, I told him he could have it for five, and he promised me the money. But when it comes to giving up, Skinner's got a grip like death. I guess he just can't stand the thought of paying me. I can't borrow from you, Mr. Murphy, but if you would buy that plate—"

"But I don't need a plate," Barney protested. "Honest, I don't know what in the world I could do with a glass plate—"

"I do," Nell interrupted decisively.

"Barney, you buy that plate."

"But, honey!"

"It would be a great accommodation," the widow sighed. "I don't know how I'll get to my daughter's if you don't buy it."

"Don't you worry," Nell assured her. "Barney has bought it. Here!" She took Barney's money from him and pressed it on the widow. "I'll walk right over to your house and get the plate, Mrs. Harris. Barney will love it when he sees it."

Barney drew her aside frantically. "Say, listen, honey! That's the last five dollars I got in the world. I don't mind lending it to help Mrs. Harris, but I don't want to buy anything. Gosh, I got troubles enough when I bought this garage!"

Nell gave him a sharp look.

"You do need a guardian," she murmured. "You don't know opportunity when it runs right over you. Lucky for you you've got me, Barney Murphy."

III.

AN hour elapsed before Nell returned to the Square Deal Garage, carrying a small, paper wrapped package which she put away in the desk in Barney's little office.

A large closed car with a New York license was halted by the gas pump. It was covered with mud and dust, for the unpaved roads by which a vehicle could reach Melton Corners were hard going. A stout, middle-aged man was its only occupant.

He was talking to Barney but he had time to speed an admiring glance after Nell's trim figure in vivid calico, a glance of which Nell was fully aware.

Barney had raised the left side hood of the car. That meant the car needed oil. Nell waited in the garage when Barney came in to fill his quart measure. Barney was grinning. He had just thought of a good answer to Nell's parting remark.

"I don't know as I need a guardian so bad," he said. "While you stuck around, you cost me five dollars. I tackled this bird without any guardian present and—look here!" He showed a ten dollar bill.

"What's that for?" Nell gasped.

"He's the fellow that Skinner's expecting. He gave it to me—"

"Why?"

"Oh, just a present." Barney grinned at her impatience and explained. "He asked me if another car with a New York license

had been along here. Of course there hadn't. So he says, 'When one shows up, just forget you ever saw me. See if you can remember that, will you?' Then he slips me this."

Nell pondered the news in amazed silence then whispered: "Don't be in a rush about finding that oil. I want to talk to him."

She strolled out of the garage, her eyes modestly cast down. Her steps led past the closed car.

"A fine morning," said the middle-aged man genially.

"Oh!—Yes sir, it's lovely!"

"Live around here, I suppose?"

"And you live in New York, I suppose?" Nell smiled engagingly.

"New York City, yes—"

"Oh! I wonder—" Nell halted, her fingers nervously plaiting her calico dress. "Are there dealers in New York who buy old furniture and old glass and things like that—heirlooms, I mean?"

The stranger's glance grew harder. But he saw only an eager and somewhat breathless village beauty. "Yes, quite a few," he admitted.

"Oh, thank you!" Nell turned away.

"Er—ah—why do you ask, if I might inquire?"

The simple village beauty looked abashed. "It was nothing, really—except I thought of going there some day to find out about something." Sudden inspiration on Nell's part. "Perhaps you know the address of one?"

"You have some old furniture to sell?"

"Oh no, not furniture. Just a funny little glass plate. It's—well, sort of an heirloom. I think they call it Sandwich glass. My grandmother said it was a cup plate."

Long lashes fringed Nell's eyes, cast down so modestly, but they didn't prevent her catching the gleam in the stranger's sharp glance. It was a gleam of avarice.

"Sandwich cup plates are sometimes worth money," he admitted guardedly. "I would be glad to look at it myself if you care—"

"I couldn't possibly think of detaining you! But if you pass this way again you might inquire at the garage."

Barney was coming forward with the oil. The stranger nodded. "You'll hear from me later," he promised.

"Honey, you oughtn't to talk to those city drivers," Barney protested with wrinkled brow. "Some of 'em are kind of fresh."

"I thought he was very nice," Nell said innocently. "And I wouldn't be surprised to see him come back here again."

Before Barney could challenge this surprising expectation Nell added: "Look, there's another car coming! That must be the one the man spoke about, Barney. I'll look after him and you run in and phone to Martin Skinner like you promised!"

The second car was departing in a hurry when Barney finished telephoning.

"He was a nice man too," Nell reported innocently. "A kind of skinny, nervous little man and he wanted to find Skinner's in an awful hurry. So I told him—"

"Which way did you tell him?"

"Why, the short way—"

"But, Nell, Skinner paid me a dollar to tell him to take the long way! Why, honey, that's—"

"It isn't dishonest, either! Skinner didn't pay me anything. And besides, Skinner didn't say anything about two cars. He meant the first car. I think the man in the second car is racing the first one and it seemed only fair to tell him the short way so they will get to Skinner's just about the same time. Besides he was a very nice man and I promised to do him a favor—"

"A favor! What favor—"

Nell giggled. "I promised him if another New York car came along and asked for Skinner's I'd tell them the wrong way altogether."

Barney sat down suddenly and held his head in his hands. "I can't make any sense out of anything," he groaned.

"Oh, I can, Barney! I think the thin man thought he got here first. It was the fat man he wanted me to send wrong. So there's really no harm done. Besides, he thinks I've done him a favor. And maybe he'll do me a favor in return some time."

"I think you've gone crazy along with Skinner and everybody else," Barney murmured, agast.

"Well," Nell said composedly, "it's a good way to go crazy. We've made eleven dollars so far and maybe we'll make more. I wouldn't be surprised to see both of those men right back here and offering us money, pretty soon."

"Now look here," Barney broke out, "It's time we had a showdown! I want to know what you've been doing—"

But Nell had him by the arm. "No. No time for any showdown! Barney, I want you to clean up around this place. Take down that 'For Sale' sign, first thing you do. When you've done that you get a monkey wrench and crawl under that old car and take it apart—do something—anything to keep busy and you stay under that car until I call you."

Barney would have protested more, but she drove him relentlessly. He did stop long enough to see her unwrap the paper package she had left on his desk.

Barney gazed with disgust at the piece of clear glass Nell held. It was a saucer, octagonal in shape, and in the middle of it had been pressed a portrait of General Washington.

Barney's nose wrinkled with disgust.

"Is that what I paid Mrs. Harris five dollars for?"

"Yes, it is—"

"Aw, honey, I could get better than that at the five and ten store!"

Nell seemed somewhat doubtful, herself.

"Maybe you're right. All I know is, this is what Martin Skinner promised five dollars for, and all the rest is just a hunch. Oh Barney! It's got to come out right, or I'll feel as if I'd murdered you!"

Barney's arm was quick to console her. "I don't give a hoot what happens to me, just so it's you that does it!" he vowed. "Go the limit, honey, you can't make me sore."

IV.

BARNEY MURPHY was under the junked car, clinking and clanking at its vitals, only the soles of his feet on view when the New York car with the stout man pulled up sharply before the gas pump. Nell was just in sight. She had left the garage and

was strolling into a path across the fields. The stout man called her hastily.

"Oh, didn't you find Mr. Skinner home?" Nell smiled.

"Yes, he was home." A flush of decided irritation showed in the round, shrewd face. "He was home, all right—Say, what's the matter with this Skinner, anyhow? A nice wild goose chase he's led me to-day!"

"He has!"

"Yes, he has. He telephoned me he had a—well, a certain article I was interested in. I drove all the way from New York to see it. And I find he has also tipped off another dealer—about the same thing. I've been running a road race against that—that crook for the last hundred miles. Driving like a fool, trying to lose him. Then when we get to Skinner's, I'm blest if he has got what he claims at all! He didn't own it. He couldn't get his hands on it! He wasted my whole day. I'm not used to being made a fool of!"

"Isn't that a shame," Nell breathed softly. "I'm so sorry—"

"Oh, yes. Well, you mentioned you had something you wanted me to look at, Miss—"

"I did? Why—"

"A piece of furniture—or glass—or some knickknack—"

"Of course, grandma's old plate. But you're not a dealer in glass, are you?"

"Yes, I am. And I'm in sort of a hurry, if you don't mind—"

"Of course," said Nell. "It's right in here—" She glanced down the road and brightened. "Look, that must be your friend—the other man you spoke about!"

"Oh—damn!" said the stout man.

The second visitor to Melton Corners was returning from Martin Skinner's with the speed of a small hurricane. He stopped his car and ran to join them.

The fat man addressed him coldly. "Look here, Breed, do you have to follow me everywhere?"

Breed sputtered, "Follow *you*? I like that, Westerman! Who's been tracking me all day like a—a cheap detective?"

"I called on Skinner because he asked me to," Westerman said with dignity.

"And so did I," Breed added promptly. "If you ask me, Skinner wanted us both there to bid against each other. Skinner isn't any fool when he's got something to sell."

"Anyhow," Westerman insisted frigidly, "I'm talking business to this young lady because *she* asked me to—and I'm not aware that she invited *you*—"

"Oh, but I did!" Nell smiled. "I thought it might be a good idea to let both of you see grandma's plate, since you both are experts on such things. Maybe both of you would want to buy it!"

The two men started simultaneously, like two men stung by the same wasp. A simultaneous grunt came from them both. Westerman was first to recover poise.

His smile was slightly ominous as he said to Nell: "I see that Martin Skinner isn't the only good business man in Melton Corners. Well, let's see what you have. For your sake, I hope it has some slight value."

Nell led them into the garage and displayed Barney Murphy's unwilling purchase. Westerman handled it while Breed crowded his shoulder, breathing hard.

Reluctantly the stout man let his little rival take the glass trifle. Neither said a word for some time. It was Breed who demanded, "How much did you expect to get for this old glass dish, miss?"

Nell looked puzzled. "I didn't say that it was for sale at all. I just wondered if—"

"I'll give you fifty dollars," Breed snapped.

"You would!" Westerman glared at him. "Fifty dollars for a Washington cup plate! Is that what you meant to offer, Skinner? Well, I'll give a hundred—"

"Hundred and twenty-five," Breed added.

"And fifty," said his rival.

But Nell silenced them both.

"I don't think I'll sell it," she said.

"My—my proposition—was to give it away—to one of you gentlemen as a—a sort of premium—for a loan." While they gasped she went on hurriedly: "It's a very safe loan, because it's going to be secured by a mortgage on this business. This is a mighty good garage business. When the road is open it can earn an average of almost

a thousand dollars every month in the year. And I want you to look over the books and satisfy yourselves about that. But just now the business has got to have money or we—we lose it. Martin Skinner, the same man you went to see, fixed it so we would lose it. He wants us to lose it—so he can sell it again. Will you listen a minute, both of you, please!"

The staring pair listened while she told of Barney Murphy and the sharp trick Skinner had played on him. When she had done Westerman, eyeing the little glass plate fondly, asked: "How much do you want?"

"A thousand dollars."

"I'll lend it—providing the books are straight."

"I'll lend it, and add a hundred dollars for that plate," Breed snapped.

"Hundred and fifty," said Westerman with a glare.

Breed shrugged. "Take it. I hope you lose your money. You've already lost your mind!"

He stalked haughtily out of the garage and bumped into Martin Skinner, coming in.

Martin Skinner was glaring wildly at a pretty little tableau, the picture of Westerman blotting a check for one hundred and fifty dollars and presenting it to Nell, receiving in return the plate of Sandwich glass.

"That's my plate!" Skinner snapped. "I'll have the law on you—"

"Oh, no," Nell beamed. "It *might* have been your plate, but it isn't. The early bird doesn't always get the worm, Mr. Skinner, not when he's so mean he doesn't want to pay for his breakfast."

An hour more found Barney Murphy in possession of his garage with the future fairly well assured. Barney could only goggle, incoherent with happiness, while Nell took stock.

"Skinner's paid. You owe Westerman the thousand. But you've got three months to pay that off, and the road will be open next month. There's a hundred and fifty over, that goes to Mrs. Harris, because it's what her plate is really worth. And besides, there's Westerman's ten dollars, not to mention the dollar Martin Skinner gave

you. Oh, Barney, that dollar—Skinner's dollar! If it hadn't been for that none of this would have happened. Skinner's spending a dollar gave the whole thing away to me.

"I knew he was expecting to make a lot, and I knew it was that plate the minute I heard about it. Don't you see, he's so mean he wouldn't pay Mrs. Harris five dollars for it until he was sure those dealers were actually on hand to buy it from

him? But I never would have guessed if he hadn't spent that dollar!"

"I don't know as I *understand* it," Barney beamed. "But I guess I understand one thing! If I hadn't been lucky enough to find a girl who's a regular business genius I'd be a fit subject for charity, the way business is in Melton Corners."

"Oh, pooh!" said Nell. "Business is good anywhere, if you just hustle around and make it good."

THE END



NOT SO FAST

OH, the world is in a flurry,
 Seems we're always in a hurry
 To be going somewhere else that's gay and new;
 E'en before the second curtain
 We are absolutely certain
 That the play's not worth a restless sitting through.

So we're off to something gayer,
 Till the ukulele player
 Brings a yawn—ah me, let's go a-seeking pep!
 Cabarets, then, till the service
 Is so slow it makes us nervous
 And the dancers have no ginger in their step.

Off we go, unceasing flitting,
 Always moving, never sitting,
 Tasting this and sipping that and tripping on—
 Even in romance we wander
 To a newer love to squander
 Lightly, till we've wearied and are gone.

Oh, let's tarry for a little
 And receive life's full remittal
 Of the deeper joys that human hearts may feel—
 Find the play has had a moral,
 Find that life is not all sorrel,
 Even find a lasting love that's true and real.

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.



Murk

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

CHAPTER XIX.

GREASY LUNT TALKS.

IT was a simple matter to pick up Greasy Lunt. Lieutenant Crinton knew the man, as did most of the police and residents of the locality. At the same time, Crinton knew that the moment Greasy was seen in his company there would be suspicions flare up among other crooks.

Greasy was no informer. He was not a courageous crook nor yet a brainy one. But he could hold his tongue with the best of them, and was conceded a certain respect on that account.

"Greasy," Crinton said to him when he had located the man on a street corner. "I want to talk to you. This is no pinch; I just want to talk with you a few minutes. If you can square me on a few points there won't be any pinch and nobody'll know a thing about our little chat."

"Sure, Crinton, any time." Greasy's eyes showed his concern, but that was the

only manner in which he indicated that Crinton might cause him trouble.

"All right. I don't need to tell you not to try to give me the slip. Hang around here for five minutes, then go straight to Kern's place, Greasy. I'll see you in the back room there."

"Sure, Crinton. Glad to. Do anything I can to help." But the police officer was walking away.

Lunt knew too well the folly of attempted flight. Many a man has been caught because he lost his nerve when he imagined the police had things on him. Greasy told himself that if Crinton really had anything on him he already would be in jail. Therefore, all that needed doing was to keep a close mouth and a nimble wit in the coming conference. He found the officer waiting.

"Greasy," Crinton began, "how well do you know Mickey Dier?"

"Pretty well. Him and me has been battin' around now and then ever since he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 19.

come here. He got me that job watchin' at the warehouse, Crinton."

"You still workin' there, Greasy?"

"Nope. Got laid off. Since the strike has been about settled they got only about a quarter the men they used to have."

"I see. Greasy—do you know Perley Jack?"

"Never even seen him! They tell me he's around, Crinton, I won't lie about that, but I've never even seen the lad."

"Did it ever occur to you that Mickey Dier might be him?"

"That Mickey might be Perley Jack? No! Don't make me laugh, Crinton!"

"I'm only askin'. The idea ain't mine, I'm only askin'. But where does the big laugh come in? Couldn't he be?"

"Naw! Mickey would of told me if he was. I don't know what you took Mickey in for, Crinton. I suppose it ain't any of my business, either. But you got him wrong. Mickey ain't done nothin'."

"Guess you didn't hear about his confession, did you?"

"Go ahead, Crinton," Greasy smiled easily. "I'd laugh if it didn't make me a little sore to have you try that old racket with me! What do I know anyhow? Nothin'! Get that? Nothin'! Not a damn thing, Crinton—and if I did I wouldn't be sucker enough to admit it!"

"I didn't think you'd be sucker enough not to admit it, Greasy," Crinton continued quietly. "You birds are the poorest eggs in the world when anything slips among you! Listen, Greasy. How well did you know Slipper Hantz?"

"You ain't got a thing on me, Crinton! I ain't done nothin' and I don't have to answer a flock of questions for you nor nobody else! And I ain't goin' to, either!"

"Suit yourself, Greasy," the officer snapped. "But chew this over and chew it over fast: you'll talk or go in for some-thing that'll make you a damned sight dizzier'n you ever been in your life!"

"But, my Gawd, Crinton—I ain't done nothin'! Why do I go in?"

"I'm only tellin' you that you never made any bigger mistake in your life than sittin' here actin' 'ritzy' with me, Greasy! How long have I been around here? Did

I ever frame anybody? Did I ever put anybody away without givin' him every break first?"

"No, Crinton, it ain't that I was thinkin' that. You're square; everybody knows that. But what can I talk about?"

"You can answer my questions, Greasy. You're goin' to, too! Before I ask 'em though, I'm goin' to give you my word of honor that Mickey has confessed, see? I guess you won't be doubtin' that will you?"

"No." Greasy Lunt's face had gone a pasty gray. He seemed to know that Crinton never would resort to such a method unless he knew whereof he spoke and had the facts about which to speak.

"Good! Now listen a little bit more. I may pinch you before we even leave here—then again I may not. I don't know myself, so I'm comin' clean with you. But anything you say now will be used against you, Greasy, if it comes to a pinch."

The other nodded mutely, his fingers intertwinning on the table between them and his lips a bluish yellow that denoted consuming fear.

"Now answer my question about Slipper Hantz," Crinton persisted.

"I knew him about like I did Mickey. He was one of the guards there at the warehouse and Mickey landed him his job, too. Mickey was aces with that private dick that was guardin' the place."

"Slipper was a pal of Mickey's?"

"Sure."

"What do you think of a pal that'll cross you, Greasy?"

"A rat, you mean?"

"Exactly. A guy that'll do a job with you, take his split and then slip a stool the whole works on his pal."

"I'd—croak a guy like that, Crinton! Damned if I wouldn't!"

"Mickey done that to Slipper." Crinton spoke almost casually.

"You'd have to—show me that!"

"You got my word of honor again. Greasy, that Mickey admitted that very thing to me himself!"

"Well, the dirty—and now is he crossin' me, Crinton?"

"How could he if you ain't done nothin'?"

"I mean—I mean—is he tryin' to frame me? A guy that would do that to a pal might try anything!"

"It's your turn to talk now, Greasy. You don't need to say another thing if you don't want to! You're in one racket and I'm in another. I'm givin' you every chance. You got five minutes before you know what I'm goin' to do, Greasy!"

The man was in the terrible position of being convinced that the officer had enough information to pin almost anything on him, yet being unable to learn just exactly what the man really knew. If he refused to talk he knew that things might go all the harder with him in view of the fact that Mickey Dier had confessed.

"Why should you be givin' me chances, Crinton?" He asked finally. "If you had anything on me you'd take me without all this chatter!"

Crinton disdained to reply. He pulled a cigar from his pocket and casually lit it. But not a fraction of a second did his eyes move from the hands of Greasy Lunt. Another minute or two passed in silence, the eyes of Lunt shifting, shifting, even as his hands seemed to grope for some loophole, some way out of the situation into which he so suddenly had been thrust.

"How much will it help me to talk, Crinton? Will you play the game with me?"

"I'd be apt to make a promise now, eh?" the officer grinned. "The time for that was before we had you anyway!"

"You can't have the whole works or you wouldn't be askin' me to talk!"

"True. But we're close enough so I won't make any promises."

Once again Greasy Lunt thought at length. Crinton, recognizing signs of weakening in the man, aided him with a word.

"Have you stopped to think about what you might lose by not talkin', Greasy?"

"I'm thinkin' that now," the crook admitted. "If I thought Mickey crossed me, Crinton—"

"I ain't sayin' he did and I ain't sayin' he didn't! But I'm sayin' he would, Greasy!"

"Crinton, if you'll tell me one thing, I'll talk!" Greasy said impulsively.

"I ain't makin' any promises," Crinton insisted. "But I'll listen to your proposition."

"Will you tell me the job you want me to talk about?"

"You mean keep you from talkin' too much, huh?"

"Take it that way if you like."

"Well—suppose we say the job on the pawnbroker?"

"I knew it! The dirty!" Greasy Lunt, faced now by the most terrible of all the things he feared, became desperate. He flung himself backward, tipped over his chair and from the floor heaved upward against the table. Crinton, watchful but not prepared for so quick a move, was entangled for a moment.

In that moment the frenzied Lunt scrambled nimbly to his feet and dashed toward the door. The officer called a warning to stop, but the crook gave no heed. Crinton drew his gun and fired into the floor.

Still the desperate fugitive ran. He was at the door leading into the main room now. It was a case of bringing the man down or risking a long hunt before he was re-captured. Also, his escape would warn everyone and possibly lose all that Perley Jack's message had gained for the cause of right.

Crinton fired again and, though he fired low with intent of only stopping Lunt, fate took a hand and the crook stooped low as he rushed the door. Crinton heard him grunt; saw him pitch head foremost through the door and grovel upon the floor of the other room. In a jiffy the officer stood over his catch and was ordering the owner of the place to send for the police ambulance in a hurry.

"Greasy got a tough break, boys," Crinton warned other men in the room. "But it won't be nothin' to the break I'll give anybody that butts in here!" Then he leaned over the gasping man on the floor.

"Where'd it get you, Greasy? I'm sorry you didn't have the sense to stop when I called you."

"It don't seem to hurt none, Crinton," the crook said. "It just knocked me for a loop when I caught it, that's all. And I feel like layin' here a long, long time!" He was smiling a little wanly. "I know it got

me good, Crinton—I feel funny as hell. But I ain't blamin' you and I ain't got any pain."

"Clean out this place, Kerns," Crinton snapped to the proprietor. "I don't want a man in here till the ambulance gets here, understand?"

The few men who had been loafing about the place left readily enough and even Kerns went outside and stood at the door to prevent the advent of newcomers. Crinton, when the men were gone, dropped to the side of Greasy Lunt.

"Greasy—you don't have to say nothin'. Not a word. Remember that. But I'm dead sure in my own mind that Mickey Dier is as dirty a rat as you ever heard of. He admitted to me that he crossed Slipper. He'd put the rap on you too, Greasy, or on me, or on his own mother, if he saw money enough! I don't know how hard you're hit and I'm not goin' to take advantage of you too much.

"I said Mickey confessed—well, he did. He confessed to robbin' the warehouse that night young Tommy Rand was bumped off. He ain't said a word about the pawnbroker—"

A new light suddenly appeared in Greasy Lunt's eyes.

"He confessed that warehouse job?" Obviously there was incredulity in the tone the wounded man used.

"He did," Crinton smiled slowly. "And I'd lay a neat roll he never did the job at all!"

"I'm thinkin' that too, Crinton—Say, listen—would you mind rollin' me over slow and easy? I'm gettin' a hell of a pain in my side. I feel like I'm shot through the middle, Crinton—"

The officer assisted the man as carefully as he could and expressed his sorrow when the crook winced with the pain of movement. Then he paid close attention to the man's words:

"I'm thinkin' he didn't have nothin' to do with that job, too," Greasy continued. "He wouldn't go for that racket, Crinton. He couldn't crack a crib in a nursery and he's afraid to get inside where he can't shoot and run! What I want to know is, what put you on my track? What makes you

think that I know about the pawnbroker stick-up?"

"I don't mind tellin' you, Greasy. Perley Jack gave us the steer on it!"

"How the hell did he know anythin'?"

"That's why I asked you if Mickey Dier might be Perley Jack, Greasy!"

A look of consuming hatred slipped like a mask over the face of Lunt. Crinton knew that his verbal shaft had plunged true to the heart of the man's suspicious nature. He sensed the depths of the other's hate and venomous desire for revenge.

"It's worth a thought, huh? He framed Slipper did he? I got your word of honor on that, Crinton?"

"You got my word of honor he admitted framin' Slipper."

"Well, the way I feel now, Crinton, I ain't goin' to live long enough to find out whether he's framin' me or not! I'm goin' to shoot while I'm alive to shoot, and I'll square accounts for Slipper anyway! Mickey Dier himself bumped off that pawnbroker, Crinton! I was there when he done it and he didn't have a thing to do with the warehouse job.

"Lookin' back I can see how he planned the whole works and I gotta hand it to him—it was clever! First off, him and Slipper pulled that break that Slipper went up for, see? Follow out the scheme and you see that Mickey gets his swag on that, then puts Slipper up to robbin' the warehouse. The very night Mickey is supposed to be watchin' outside the warehouse he has planned this stick-up of the old pawnbroker, see?"

The man tried to move again to ease his pain and Crinton assisted him carefully. Ultimately he began talking once more, but the effort was becoming more difficult for him.

"That's where I come in. He tells me he's got a soft thing that night and wants me to do an outside stand while he's pullin' the works. I agree and we go to the pawnbroker's. He ain't in there more than five minutes when I hears a shot and he comes runnin'.

"Later he admits to me that he has to bump off the old bloke and he slips me near two grand for my end. He tells me there

ain't a chance of our bein' nailed for the job and to keep my mouth shut no matter what comes, see? Well, I'm in then—what could I do?

"Now he pulls a squeal on that warehouse job, eh? He's fixin' an alibi for himself figgerin' that Slipper won't say nothin' or don't know nothin'! Mickey was supposed to be watchin' outside while Slipper was doin' a job on the crib. Instead of that he beats it to meet me, pulls off this pawnbroker job and gets back to the warehouse before Slipper has finished!

"And even then he don't go alone. Straight from the pawnbroker's he goes to get this kid Tommy Rand, see? The kid thinks he's goin' to get a job, but I know different, now! He was goin' there as a sucker, Crinton. Mickey Dier was a guard at the joint and so was Slipper. They was goin' to plant a little stuff on the kid and send him up for doin' the job on the crib! I can see that now!"

"Then Tommy Rand wasn't in on the job, really, Greasy?"

"Naw!—He was doin' a sucker play for this Dier! And—I guess he wasn't the only sucker there, neither! Me and Slipper ain't got no medals for brains comin' our way!"

"One thing more, Greasy," Crinton hastened to ask for he saw that the wounded man was verging upon coma; "Do you think Dier is Perley Jack now? Is that scar thing that Jack wears the real goods?"

"He ain't Perley Jack, Crinton. I know a couple jobs this Perley baby has done—Mickey Dier wouldn't have the guts to do 'em! But he may be playin' with Jack right now—"

"You think Perley Jack is crossin' him, then? By sendin' me this steer?"

"Naw—I can't make that at all—Perley Jack would blow him apart mebbe—but he wouldn't cross him! I'm thinkin' that Mickey Dier sent the steer himself signin' Perley's name to it just for looks, see? That's why I talked, Crinton! Mickey took that way to hang the pawnbroker killin' on me, that's all. He's willin' to take a stretch for burglary to duck the chair. Somethin' has scared him—maybe Slipper got wise that he was framed, see?—I don't know all the story.

"But listen here—I'll be as wise as Mickey now! I don't want to make no wise cracks against the cops, Crinton—but I been readin' the papers and I never read where the pawnbroker got bumped off by the same gun that killed this Tommy Rand!"

"There's a lot of thirty-eight caliber guns around, Greasy," Crinton said thoughtfully. "Just what was you drivin' at?"

"Well—damn this cheap rat—I'll tell you somethin' that'll stand if you got the brains to follow it through! Mickey Dier bumped off the pawnbroker and Mickey Dier bumped off that punk kid Rand, too! Him and Slipper had two of the guards fixed at the warehouse that night. They thought they was goin' to make a big haul and Mickey still thinks that Slipper done him in on the loot. Maybe that's what made him sore enough to cross Slipper on that first job!

"Anyhow, when they was makin' their out from the joint, a copper in harness shows up and they has to make a run for it. The copper starts shootin' and Mickey, bein' afraid that this kid will stand and tell why he's there, plugs him from behind and you suckers think it's the cop that done it!

"Put the screws on that rat and you'll find I'm right!"

The arrival of the ambulance put an end to further talk.

"This is a rush case, doctor," Crinton ordered. "Get this man to an operating table quick as you can and pull him through if possible. But get a police statement from him first, understand? I'll have men there to take it as quick as you get him there."

Then the officer made the necessary telephone calls and went to his home to think matters out in his own way.

"I'm gladder'n I can tell you, Mary," he said to the girl after relating in detail the events which had just transpired, "that the father of little Danny wasn't a crook even for a minute!"

After a time he called the station house and asked what the detectives had succeeded in getting from Slipper Hantz at Sing Sing. The sergeant laughed a little as he answered.

"That's a tough egg, that Hantz, lieu-

tenant! He made a short and sweet statement. This was it: 'You guys are takin' the people's money for bein' smart. Earn your dough. Find out!'

"It's a case of gettin' either Perley Jack or tyin' this letter to Dier himself," Crinton rejoined.

"Tie it to Mickey," the sergeant answered. "We got word an hour ago that Perley Jack is in Joliet right now! He went up two months ago under the name of Rafterty and they hadn't checked up on him yet. They found out when we sent out our general letter for him!"

CHAPTER XX.

CRINTON SQUEEZES.

FAR into the night of that day Mary could hear the soft treading of Lieutenant Crinton's feet as the man walked the floor. She knew something of the perplexities that gripped his mind and drove out all thought of rest. Dier's confession, the letter purportedly from a man they now knew was in prison, and the statement of Greasy Lunt had created a colossal maze amid which lay the road to truth.

Crinton probed for that road with all the astute powers that his years of experience had given him. Mary took to watching for a variation in his step. Sometimes the sound would deteriorate into a mere creaking of boards under his stationary feet. Then she imagined him in characteristic pose pondering upon some new angle. She could equally well visualize the defeat of his new thought by resumption of the pacing. And so it continued until her own eyes closed in weariness.

The officer was at breakfast promptly the next morning and Mary searched his face hopefully for some evidence of progress toward solution. Once or twice she thought she caught traces of hope that had not cheered the man the night before. But these were dashed to the ground when he arose from the table.

"Danny," he said, "how soon will that contract begin to require your time?"

"Pretty soon, dad! I heard yesterday

that the committee of the workers and owners are to meet this week and everyone thinks that settlement of the strike will follow that conference."

"A week, Danny?"

"Maybe. Might come in three days, dad. Gee, I hope it does! I can hardly wait to get started. We will make a lot of money out of that contract. I've already hired five men for driving the trucks and I'm going to take a small office right at the warehouse. After that I'll need two bookkeepers and a foreman for the loading crews—pretty big organization for a start, eh?"

Mary leaned across the table to slip her hand under Danny's and the lad smiled happily. But the smile froze on his lips and Mary arose in startled objection at the next words spoken.

"I'm arrestin' you this mornin', Danny!" his father announced. "For complicity in the robbin' of the warehouse along with Mickey Dier. Now keep still both of you! I pretty near know what I'm doin'! It's the only thing that can be done under the circumstances, and if I don't do it right quick—some of the squad will!"

"I'll be takin' you over with me and you can sit around the station on your promise not to leave. Then nobody ever could say you'd got a break that wouldn't have come your way if you weren't my lad!"

"This is my first move in a plan that ought to break the back and the heart of this Dier rat in short order. I've talked it all over with your mother, Danny. She agrees with me. There's just one thing I want to know—and that I know already—but me bein' a copper for so long I've learned not to be surprised at anything!"

"Tell me this, Danny. Is there any chance of Mickey really tyin' this thing on you? Give me your word of honor one way or the other, lad—were you led astray that night thinkin' to help Mary?"

"You have my word of honor, dad. I was not. Just a little before that night Mary had told me about little Danny. I've loved Mary ever since I saw her and that news seemed to tear the soul out of me—maybe you can understand—I can! I wanted to be alone. I told Tommy that

very evening that I was going to Coney to think."

"Well, why in hell didn't you tell me before! If Tommy knew."

"But Tommy cannot help, dad! Poor Tommy is dead!"

"Right! But Tommy was with Dier after you left and that's what gave the crook his tip that you were out alone! Without that he'd never have had the nerve to put you in the confession—can't you see that? By gorry, lad, you're dumb—God help that truckin' business!"

Despite the strain of the moment they all laughed at Crinton's vehement relief. He lit his after-breakfast cigar and leaned back comfortably.

"Here's the plan," he said. "I ought to have it worked out by to-night so that you can come home again, Danny. I'm goin' to take you over and enter you as a vag. You can sit in the back room and play checkers and we'll let Mickey know you're in, see?"

"Next—I'm goin' to see that Slipper Hantz learns that Mickey is hooked for killin' little Tommy Rand and I'm goin' to give Slipper his choice between tellin' all that he knows and goin' to the chair as an accomplice to the murder! That'll fetch Mr. Slipper pretty fast if I know the breed! Mention the chair to these rats and they'll turn tail like a pup facin' a grizzly!"

"Slipper's story ought to hook up with Greasy Lunt's and if it does—well, that's the end! And right while they're workin' on Slipper up at Sing Sing, we'll be doin' a little job on Mickey Dier here! Between them we'll scare up somethin' that'll make your head swim!"

But even the buoyance of Crinton could not entirely dispel the terror of Mary. When she saw Danny walk out with his father an obsession that he might never return assailed her. She threw herself into Mrs. Crinton's arms.

"Sure, the old man nearly always knows what he's doin', Mary, dear," the older woman assured her. "I'm bettin' on him to come out on top and I believe my Danny when he gives his word of honor—I don't care how many confessions and weak alibis there are against him!"

The hours of that morning passed slowly for the two women. There was no word from Crinton and both felt that he would call them just as soon as anything of importance happened. For once, no news did not seem good news. They did their housework with a silence that was apprehensive and each looked a thousand times at the telephone as if offering a silent prayer for the good news to come.

It was mid afternoon when Mary answered, almost breathlessly, a summons at the door bell.

"It's the rear door, child!" Mrs. Crinton called as the girl started in the wrong direction. Mary retraced her steps and scarcely had she succeeded in opening the door when the form of a man slipped into the room. In a flash she saw that he was dressed in the cheapest of clothes; a black suit that showed signs of fading and bore the marks of rough usage. A cap was pulled close about his forehead and he seized the girl by the arm as she drew back in surprise.

"Don't holler, Mary—for God's sake, don't holler out!"

"Joe!" Mary gasped the name, at the same time glancing over her shoulder apprehensively.

"Yes. It's me, Mary! I hadda come to sew up the whole thing before I beat it. God knows, I ain't here 'cause I wanted to come! Old man Crinton would take me the minute he clapped eyes on me!"

"But, Joe! Why did you come? He will arrest you—nothing on earth will stop him. You know as well as I do how he is about such things!"

"I come to clear you up with Mickey Dier."

"I have been so afraid, Joe dear! I read of your escape and every night has been a nightmare to me. I had no idea where you were or what you might be doing. I knew you had been in New York because of your wire—but all these long nights—Joe where have you been? How have you lived? You haven't?"

"Pulled another job? No. I ain't, Mary, and that's straight! I been livin' in one of the warehouses down on the docks. A fine place to camp out, that is, too! A

packin' case for a bed and rats as big as dogs racin' over you at night! Ugh!—At night it was cold enough to freeze an ice-berg!"

"But why, Joe? Why have you remained here? Couldn't you get away? Oh, Joe—something tells me it was foolish of you to escape! What can there be for you? If only you could get away to some other land and—"

"Never mind the sob stuff, sis," the escaped convict grunted a little callously. "We ain't got time for it and it can't do no good anyway."

"Heavens above! Joe Delt!" Mrs. Crinton stood in the kitchen door and looked at them with amazement filling her face.

"Shut up!" Joe growled. "You can go in the front room and forget that you lamped me, see?"

"Don't you be talkin' to me like that, you young whippersnapper! The ideal Shut up, is it? Well—" Mrs. Crinton bristled into the room and approached them.

"Listen, Mrs. Crinton—I'm Joe Delt all right, and I know your old man would give a lot to lay his hands on me. But he ain't goin' to, see? And if he does it'll be a damn sorry thing for him! I'm here to help Mary and I ain't ever goin' back to that prison! Never! I'll croak first—and that ain't any song and dance music, either!"

"Sure, it's time you helped the poor child, Joe Delt!" The woman challenged spitefully. "High time, I'll be sayin'!"

"Well, I'm here to do it. Put a bag over that chatter and listen to me, will you? You keep on punishin' English and we won't never get no place."

The manner of the lad and the change that had come over him since last Mrs. Crinton had seen him, conspired to take the fight out of her. She sputtered a moment, puffed out her cheeks in high dudgeon, then dropped into a chair and wheezed ineffectually. Joe turned to Mary again.

"Gee, kid! I know how rotten we were to you. But that is the only job I ever was mixed up in and it looked like such a sure thing. You know how the old man was all in! A guy that has lugged ship stores as

long as him has a right to one bid at somethin' soft! I know it wasn't just right—but—"

"I'm not thinking of myself, Joe! I want you to be safe and not to suffer."

"I'm only tellin' you, kid. I'd like to do somethin' to give you a break. You've caught merry hell since it all happened! That's why I crushed out of the million dollar home up the river, sis! I learned that Mickey Dier was plannin' to frame you up. It wouldn't have done any good to tell others—"

"Joe—you know Mickey Dier—"

"Do I know the rat? Do I know him!—I'll say I know him! That's why I made the break! If you'll let me alone I'll tell you the story—and please don't keep askin' me questions because by the time old Crinton gets back here I want to be on my merry way!"

"I was up there workin' in one of the shops when a fellow named Slipper Hantz comes up for a stretch of four years for burglary. Slipper is put in the same shop with me and we got acquainted. He seemed like a reasonable guy and it wasn't long before I learned that he was suspicious of some guy for framin' him up. He told me the whole story by degrees. Finally I learned that his pal on the burglary job was Mickey Dier!"

"He tells me the whole story and I agreed with him that this Dier rat had framed him. It was easy to see after you had them long nights to think it over in, Mary! Just about that time I was made a trusty which made it easier for me. Then Slipper told me that him and Mickey had also done the warehouse job where Tommy Rand was croaked! I knew Tommy Rand was nobody else than your husband."

"After a while—Slipper never knew then that I was your brother—he slipped me the word that he thought Mickey was the guy that croaked the pawnbroker, too. He had it figgered out that Mickey beat it away from the warehouse while he was inside crackin' the crib, see? By the time he come out Mickey was done with that job and back at the docks. He had Tommy Rand with him and Slipper tells me that Tommy was a sucker who didn't even know there

was a prowl bein' pulled! Expectin' to get a job, he was!

"Then the coppers break open with the shootin' and Slipper and Tommy and Mickey Dier all beat it. But when Slipper tells me about Tommy bein' killed he ain't any too definite and he winks in a way that I took my own meanin' from, Mary. He made me believe that Mickey Dier killed Tommy and that the cop didn't hit anybody at all.

"The copper was shootin' in the air, at first," Slipper said. I pressed him hard for facts on that warehouse thing. I knew the job had left you without a dime and without nothin' to do but find work again and live in hell! Then he told me that Mickey Dier had slipped you the money to fade out and that you had gone. Mickey boasted that that cleared them all—Tommy bein' dead.

"Just a short time after that Slipper finds himself framed and takes his stretch without mentionin' Mickey Dier. But up in the big house he finds time to think and he suspects that Mickey is a framer. He framed you outa the way—he framed Tommy—and Slipper felt pretty sure that he had framed him.

"I just had a hunch that Dier was after you and that he would have you up the river unless somebody that knew his racket was on hand to get the works on him. So I told Slipper I was goin' to make a break for it some night when I was left outside to clean up the yards. I told him who I was and all about you and Tommy.

"There ain't anything those fellows hate like they do a rat, Mary. Slipper wished me luck and told me of a friend of his in Tarrytown, right near the prison, that would fix me with clothes and enough money to carry me till I could get the works on Mickey. He told me to look up a fellow named Greasy Lunt here, too. Greasy and Mickey had pulled off some kind of a job and Slipper told me to tip off Greasy that he had better watch Dier.

"Well—I made the crush out as you know! The fellow in Tarrytown gave me these clothes and a little jack. I hung out there till the first excitement of my escape had died out, then he drove me into

town. It was while I was layin' up in his place that he told me of a pal of his named Perley Jack who had just got two years in Joliet under another name. He'd have got ten years if they had known he was Perley Jack!

"That gave me the idea of usin' Perley Jack's name here in town. I told Greasy Lunt to spread the word that Perley was in town and I worked on Mickey through Greasy, see? I had them all steppin' sideways for a while!

"All this time I was livin' in the old south warehouse where nobody ever came on account of the strike. Greasy knew I was there and he fixed it with a pal of his that was a guard for those private dicks, to slip me grub.

"At night I'd sneak out and follow Mickey, tryin' to get somethin' on him. He's pretty sly, Mary, that Dier is. I was the fellow outside the window that night you and Crinton was talkin' with Dier. I heard him admit he had framed Slipper that night. And I was scared because I believed Crinton when he said Dier had it on him. I warned Greasy again, but he got the idea I was workin' a racket of my own and wouldn't fall for it.

"So then I wrote Crinton that note and tipped him off to make Greasy talk—"

"You wrote the note signed Perley Jack?" Mary asked.

"Nobody else! I sure did. Crinton nor any other cop would ever have got that steer on their own. By that time I knew that Mickey had somethin' over you and over Crinton, too. Finally I began wonderin' where the three grand he slipped you came from! The warehouse job never gave it to him—Slipper told me that, and Slipper also told me it was three grand that Mickey gave you.

"My whole game had been to get Mickey worried over the pawnbroker killin' so that I could make him play my game if he was guilty, like Slipper thought."

Joe Delt moved quickly to the sink and gulped a huge glass of water before continuing further.

"Get this as I shoot it over to you, sis," he snapped then. "The guard at the warehouse slipped me the news this mornin'

that Crinton had knocked off his own son and ever since then I been plannin' just how to tell you this in the quickest way. Don't forget none of it because I'm not comin' back this way!

"When I first landed in New York, after crushin' out, I got Greasy to tell the fellow that was murdered the other night that a pal of Slipper's was out and brought word from Slipper that the police was tryin' to frame Mickey for bumpin' off the pawnbroker. That worried Mickey and I could see it. It also worried Greasy! It was through Greasy that I learned where you were and that Mickey had gone up there after you.

"Greasy sent that wire signed by me and when Mickey learned about that he was more than worried. He got into an argument with the fellow he telephoned to from Troy—and he killed that man! That was no hold-up, exactly. Mickey killed him because he discovered that the fellow had told somebody about the trip Mickey took. He robbed him afterward and Greasy said he got a big roll there.

"But when Crinton took Mickey in I knew that the crook couldn't have much of anything on him and I knew that Greasy would be scared that Mickey might talk. Then Greasy kicked in with the whole story and before I could get word to Crinton he had shot poor Lunt and got the story himself.

"I guess that's about all, kid. Those three killin's are Mickey Dier's! Now all I want to know is, where in hell did Crinton get the idea he had to pinch his own kid? What's Danny in for?"

"Dier has confessed the warehouse job, Joe. He names Danny as one of his accomplices in that!"

"He's a liar!" Joe Delt grunted. "Slipper Hantz told me the whole story on that and Danny wasn't near them! But if Mickey confessed to that job it proves some-thin' else! It proves that Greasy's story about the pawnbroker is true and it proves to me somethin' that I've wondered a lot about and ought to have seen first off!"

"What is that?"

"The three grand! Where did Mickey get it, I been askin' myself all this time—"

"So have we, Joe—do you know?"

Joe Delt smiled easily before answering. "Pretty sure, sis," he offered. "Mickey Dier got the money from holding up the pawnbroker! He gave Greasy nearly two grand just for standin' outside! That was some haul! Then he slipped you the three grand and was wise enough to make it enough to start you away. With you gone, and Slipper in stir, and Tommy dead—well, what in the world did he have to worry about, anyway?"

Mary Delt thought on her brother's words until he showed signs of impatience. One or two questions she asked him in order to perfect the story in her mind. Then she turned to Mrs. Crinton and that woman nodded her recollection of the details of Joe's astounding story. Then Mary slipped her arms about her brother's neck and kissed him tenderly.

"I have no money to give you, Joe!" she lamented. "If I had you should have it. Mrs. Crinton would not dare—Daddy Crinton never would forgive her. But I will never forget all that you have done for me—and Joe, dear, if worst comes to worst, let them take you again—don't try to—fight back."

"I'll never go back to that place, Mary," Joe cried viciously. "They trusted me and I broke their trust. What can I ever expect from them again? I'd lose all my time for good behavior, do the full fifteen stretch and probably five on top of that for breakin' jail! They can go to hell, sis! I'd rather croak than go back!"

He threw his arms about her impulsively. "Anyway—I done that much for you—I'll be goin' now!"

He was still in her arms. None in the room had seen the door slowly open and the stealthy form of Crinton appear therein. He seemed to hear the last words and recognition of Joe Delt lighted his features. Without a sound he drew his revolver, trained it upon the two, then spoke.

"Not now you won't be goin', Joe. Not now!"

Joe turned like a tiger at bay. He whirled about, a snarl on his pale lips.

"I will be goin', Crinton, damn you! I will be goin'! Nobody ever gave you better

breaks than me—you bum cop! Shoot and be damned!"

He darted toward the door and Mary screamed as she saw the gun hand of the officer raised. But Crinton did not shoot. Instead he hurled the weapon through the air and as it struck Joe Delt a stunning blow on the head the officer was upon him. He pinned the dazed lad to the floor; sat upon him and, despite the pleading of Mary, dragged his hands behind him and whipped handcuffs about his wrists.

As he arose Mary lost her head. She flew into a fury and threw herself against the officer. Her hands struck blindly at his face the while she cried out that Joe must go free.

"You don't understand—you don't know—Oh, you coward!"

It was with difficulty that he controlled her and allowed Mrs. Crinton to lead her, sobbing, from the room. Then Crinton turned again to the sullen lad on the floor.

"They phoned the station house, Joe—the people next door. They said a tough looking egg had sneaked into my back door and was still in the house. I got here in time to hear most of your story. It'll win Danny free and clear Mary, too."

"Ain't you a fine stiff to take me in—after that?" Joe sneered. "A great guy, you are, Crinton!"

"We'll be goin' over, Joe," Crinton said slowly. "Right is right and duty is duty—I may be able to help you, but I'm damned if I can let you go!"

CHAPTER XXI.

FRAMING THE FRAMER.

THE station house was only five blocks away from the Crinton home, but the lagging pace the officer set up would have consumed a long time in getting them there. He did not offer to converse with his prisoner, nor did Joe talk to him. The younger man felt that he was receiving the shabbiest of treatment, and a sneer enveloped his pale lips.

Two blocks from the house the officer paused and slipped a key into the cuffs that held Joe's arms.

"Joe, my lad," he said somewhat ponderously, "this is a dirty job you've wished on me by comin' to my house! I know you did it for Mary and I know you think I'm about as much of a skunk as Mickey Dier himself—but what can I do? I've got to take you in. I can't even let you lay me out and tell folks you made a get-away on me. They'd know I ain't the kind that gets laid out and they'd shout some mean inferences—which would be correct!"

"But don't forget this—I've always played on the level, even with crooks, Joe! And it's me that's carried your sister through the hell that grabbed her! You didn't! Even her own father didn't—so I ain't all rotten, Joe!"

"I know it," the youth acknowledged, listlessly. "Damn it all, Crinton—you're white! But—couldn't you give me a break—just a little one? Hell—let me make a break and then drill me—I'd rather croak than go back—there!"

"You're talkin' a bit wild, Joe. But I think I know how you feel, at that. No. I've got a better idea that just popped into my head. We must remember this, Joe. Every bit of evidence we own against Dier is the word of men previously convicted of crime. Zinberg would make a big thing of that, Joe! He'd swear you were framin' Dier to get out of doin' your own time, see?"

"Now I've known you for a long time, Joe. I know you ain't a crook like these other fellows. I know you're a little wild and a whole lot of a damned fool—but not a crook that has the crooked streak born right in him! My idea is good if it works, Joe. It'll help you; it'll absolutely save Mary and Danny—I suppose you know they're goin' to get married?—and it'll send Mickey Dier over a road with no return route."

"Married? Mary and Danny? Are you on the level in that, Crinton?"

"I'm on the level in everything, Joe."

"Well, I'll be damned! Mary and Danny, eh? Danny is a damn fine kid, Crinton!"

"Mary is an angel, Joe!"

"What's this racket of yours, Crinton? What's the game?"

"Joe—Mickey Dier is scared to death of this Perley Jack. I want you to come around to the drug store and I'll get some dope that'll fix up a nice scar on your cheek. Then I want you to swear on your word of honor not to make a break for it. After I get you fixed I'll have one of the boys pick you up for Perley Jack and bring you in, see? Then we'll have you get to Mickey in the station house cell and I want you to put the fear of God into his measly soul, Joe!

"I want you to make it so strong that he won't dare get out into the street, Joe, if we give him the chance. Then we're goin' to give him a chance, Joe! We're goin' to tell him that he's to go down to headquarters to be questioned. But before we tell him that, Joe—you're goin' to tell him that you're Perley Jack and that your pinch is a blind all the way through just to give you a chance to talk to him, see?

"Tell him that you are solid with the coppers and that you know he framed Slipper and was just about to frame Greasy Lunt. Tell him that you're goin' to see that he never goes to the chair because you're goin' to bump him off in your own way before he ever gets that far, Joe. Then tell him that your pull has already fixed it for a call from headquarters later this afternoon. That call will be for Mickey Dier—to question him.

"And now comes the big part, Joe. Do this well, kiddo, and I'll do something bigger'n you think for you some day! Tell him that just when he steps from the door of this station you're goin' to step close to him and blow his insides all over New York!

"At first he'll think it's bluff, Joe. Then tell him that you are only there by your own plannin' and that you are expectin' a telephone call any minute to tell us fellows where we fit and to turn you loose. Make it strong. Scare the rat to death—I'll do the rest, Joe."

"I'll play," Joe said simply. "I broke jail to get this pup, Crinton—the farther I go after him the better I'll be satisfied."

And so it was arranged that Mickey Dier, he who had framed every man who ever had trusted him, was himself to face

a frame-up planned for his especial benefit. Crinton easily made the arrangements at the station and half an hour after Joe Delt left the drug store he was arrested by a plain clothes man and "brought in."

The station was small enough so that Dier, incarcerated in the one cell that usually served to hold men only for a few hours, could hear what took place at the chain of the desk sergeant.

"Check this bird in as a vag, sergeant," the detective ordered. "I'll have a charge against him soon. Unless I'm cuckoo it'll be one that'll stand the whole force on its ears, too!"

"Yeah! You're a very wise sap, you are!" Joe answered in loud tone. "I'll just about have you poundin' a beat out in the sticks somewhere for this! You ain't got the sense God gave a gray goose with no tail feathers!"

"Book him, sergeant! I've heard these guys talk before!"

"You'll hear me talk again!" Joe promised. "And don't forget this, either—I got a right to use the telephone. I want to use it. You can put the call in for me—you simp! Call the district attorney's office and get the district attorney himself—I don't want any assistants and I won't take a stall—tell them that Jack—Jack from the West—wants a word with the old man!"

After a few moments more Joe was led to the cell and shoved inside. He waited until the officer had left, during which time he indulged in some profound promises of dire revenge upon the police, then turned quickly toward Mickey Dier.

"Hello, Mickey!" he grinned. "So we meet at last, eh? We meet and you don't even know me! Well—that's easy—they call me Perley Jack, Mickey!"

Dier fell back from the man partly through awe and partly fear.

"Yep! Perley Jack!" Joe continued. "I guess I don't need to say no more, Mickey. Slipper Hantz was a pal of mine—so was Greasy Lunt—and so was Tommy Rand. Kinda surprises you, huh? Well, I can't help that."

"I ain't surprised—I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"No? Then you're sure gettin' a tough break, kid!" Joe sneered. "Because I've come all the way from Chi to blow you to hell!"

"Blow me! What's the matter—Jack? I ain't done nothin'! I don't even know you!"

"You framed Slipper! You killed Tommy Rand! You was about to frame Greasy for bumpin' off that pawnbroker and you know you done that yourself! You—"

"For God's sake stop, Jack—Wait a minute—not so loud!"

Mickey Dier glanced about the corners of the cell—then he walked to the door and peered obliquely along the narrow corridor. He was fighting masterfully for control of himself.

"My God, Jack!—use some sense," he whined when again he faced Joe Delt.

"Sense?" Joe sneered. "I don't need no sense, Mickey. This pinch of mine I framed myself! That poor sap of a dick don't know it, but I tossed myself right into his arms and he had to bring me in! Know why? You heard me put in a call for the district attorney didn't you, Mickey? Well—I'll get him in a minute, kid! When I do I'll walk outa this place like Grant walked outa Richmond!"

"And why did I come in, you ask? Why did I fix it to have myself pinched? Easy! Because I'm set to throw a scare into these dicks that'll keep 'em off me and I'm goin' to clean out this town in the next two weeks, Mickey! Clean it out—the jobs I got laid will net us half a million in that time! And another reason you want? Easy again! Because when I bump off a guy I want him to know what he's collectin' for, Mickey."

"I'm goin' to bump you off soon—bump you so cold you'll never thaw out—you dirty rat! And I staged this pinch to tell you that, see? And another thing I'll be tellin' you, now that we're here! Any minute I'll get the big boss on the phone. He will do what I say! I'll walk outa here with the laugh on this bunch right!—Then know what I'll do? —Well, lemme tell you, Mickey!"

"When I talk with his nibs I'll tell him to send for you inside the next ten minutes. I'll tell him to order these dumb cops to

bring you to his office for questioning. And—listen to this—rat!—The minute you walk out that door onto the street—look for me! I'll be there—I'll step up close and smile—I will—then I'll blow holes in you till you look like a sieve—and that'll be damn soon, Mickey—damn soon—!"

Joe did a good job. Dier, a natural craven at best, wilted with the yellow nature of him asserting itself in pleadings. But scarcely had Mickey begun to plead when an officer appeared and called to Joe.

"The district attorney is on the line, mister," he grunted deferentially, as he fussed with the lock.

"It's about time!" Joe complained, paying no heed to Mickey Dier.

"Don't be rough on us, cap," the officer urged as he released Joe. "We didn't know who you were when we brought you in—"

"I told you you'd be poundin' a beat in the sticks!" Joe growled. "And you will, too! By this time to-morrow!" Mickey Dier could hear the officer still pleading for another chance as the two walked down the corridor. Perley Jack did not come back to the cell. Mickey heard other officers apologizing to him. Even Crinton joined in the apologies.

Not ten minutes had passed when the turnkey again appeared at the door. He was whistling softly as he unlocked the cell.

"Come along, Mickey Dier," he called. "The district attorney just phoned that he wants a gabfest with you!"

Right there Mickey collapsed, figuratively speaking.

"No! No!" he screamed. "This whole thing is a frame-up to get me into the street! That man you just let go—that's Perley Jack!—he only came in here to warn me—he's fixed it for this call—he's going to wait outside and kill me—!"

"You're crazy as hell!" the officer announced phlegmatically. "I know that's Perley Jack—damn it! But why should he frame you? You're small pumpkins to that guy, Dier—come a runnin'!"

It was necessary for Mickey Dier to be dragged down that narrow corridor. He pleaded, he fought, he beseeched. Crinton appeared as if attracted solely by the noise Mickey made. The climax came when Dier

looked through the open door of the station and caught plain sight of Perley Jack standing peacefully on the opposite side of the street. Then it was that he wailed out a willingness to make his statement to the police at the station.

And with Joe Delt standing across the street apparently in the greatest of impatience, Mickey Dier made that statement. Under the skillful and relentless guidance of Crinton he poured forth the secrets of his wizened soul. When he had scrawled his signature across the bottom of the confession Crinton smiled happily.

"Send my kid home, sergeant!" he ordered. "This confession tallies in every detail with the word of Greasy Lunt and Joe Delt. We've got Mr. Mickey-Dier where not even Zinberg can throw him a rope! You're cooked, Mickey. And now maybe it might be fair to tell you that Slipper Hantz talked today, too. It took time—but when he learned that you framed him—he talked!

"Greasy Lunt is goin' to pull through and he'll be there at the trial to admit all the things you confessed here. And now Joe Delt—"

"I don't know him, Crinton—never heard of him!" Mickey whined weakly.

"No? Well—damned if your life ain't incomplete, Mickey! I'll have you meet him right away—Joe!"

Mickey Dier looked once at the smiling face of Joe Delt. He half arose from his chair—"You—you—framed — me!" He gasped.

"No!" cried Crinton affectedly—"you don't say! How does it feel to be framed, Mickey?"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECOND GIFT.

THE mills of the gods grind slowly, even as do the wheels of justice. But they grind, one as relentlessly as the other.

Throughout the fall and winter that followed the confession of Mickey Dier, Zinberg the lawyer brought to bear every trick known to legal machinery in behalf of his client. But even Zinberg admitted that it

was a fight against time rather than conviction.

The trial took place. Through the influence of Lieutenant Crinton both Mary and Danny were spared the need of testifying. The fully corroborated confession of Dier proved his downfall when coupled with the testimony of Greasy Lunt, Slipper Hantz and Joe Delt.

So there came the night when Mickey Dier died, in the stony calm of that little room where all is gray, and solemn men sit about to watch the State enforce the decree of "a life for a life."

To the priest who waited upon him Mickey again made full confession. Hidden away in the wall of the room he had maintained on the street of murk the police found all that was left of the twenty thousand he had taken from the murdered pawnbroker and five thousand more that he had taken from his last victim.

It was a day in June that the Crinton house was gay with decorations for a great event. In the parlor that had become so dear to her, Mary was wedded to Danny Crinton. The affair was a gala one. Many new friends gathered to bless the two and wish them the happiness that was their due. Men were present who were associated with Danny in his trucking affairs; owners and officers of the big warehouses, once more alive with the voice of commerce and the glad shouts of the returned strikers.

Mary was very happy. Danny was very proud. Crinton of the police department, lately promoted to a captaincy, proclaimed the day the greatest of his life and his wife wept and smiled by turn as she clung to his arm.

It was when the wedding banquet was about to be served and the entire party had become imbued with the happiness of the occasion that Captain Crinton sprung his last big surprise.

"We'll wait one moment before we sit down," he announced. "This seems to the old lady and me the right time to offer our second present to the happy bride and groom! God knows it is a gift that comes from the heart! I'm happier than a man has a right to be this day, that I am. But

of all things there is none sweeter to the heart of me than this!"

From an inner pocket he drew forth a paper. With fingers that trembled with emotion he unfolded it and disclosed its nature to the guests.

"A pardon!" Mary cried. "Oh, daddy Crinton! A pardon!"

Crinton called out and Joe Delt came into the room. His smile was as happy, as genuine, as it was diffident. Mary ran to him and he took his sister in his arms.

"Damned big is the man who has no mistake behind him!" Crinton said in husky tones. "Either that or damned small! I want everybody to meet my friend, Joe Delt—brother of the bride and a he-man with the courage to fight for his sister!"

"And also, Joe Delt—foreman of the

Crinton Trucking Company!" Danny added before others might speak.

Because Mary was crying softly on the shoulder of her brother and the occasion was not one for tears, Crinton bellowed forth a hearty order:

"Sure, it's fools that men would be to stand long beside a table the old lady had filled for a feast!"

Then he caught his wife by the hand, kissed her resoundingly, and led her to her place.

At the head of the table were the bride and the groom. They gathered their happiness from gazing at each other rather than from the bounteous offering of food.

In a corner of the room little Danny chortled happily.

Thus ground the mills of the gods.

THE END



AFTER ALL

THE night is wanton, soft the breeze
In the palo verde trees.
And up the cañon drifts a strain
In faintly plaintive string'd refrain:
There is a dance to-night at Lee's.

Beneath the young stars clustered low
Rainbow colors pause and go,
Silken shirts are flaming bright
In the torches' garish light.
She is dancing there I know.

I see her laugh, blue eyes upturned,
Bestow the smile I never earned—
But after all, I do not care;
The night is fairer here than there;
The music leaves me unconcerned.

The desert is a love more fast
Than tangled hair with yellow cast—
There is true sweetness on the plain,
No sad'ning residue of pain,
For low stars smile, and tall hills last.

H. A. Woodbury, Jr.



A Chauffeur's License

By GORDON STILES

RAINHEY breathed a sigh of contentment as he listened to the soft purr of the motor and the steady hum of the tires as his big car rolled smoothly over the asphalt. In all London, this was his favorite drive. Up the Mall to Hyde Park Corner, through the park to Marble Arch, along Hyde Park Gardens and Bayswater Road, around Kensington Gardens and return by way of Fulham Road. Especially in September, when the blue haze of late afternoon hung low, investing the trees and shrubbery with an air of mystery and enchantment.

Before him, as he swung into the park drive, was the never-ending line of motors, moving steadily and softly at regulation speed. Nicely spaced, sedate of mien. Bearing smart women and well groomed men, driven by uniformed chauffeurs who

sat very straight and never took their eyes from the paving.

All correct—so correct! It was a relief from the snarl and jumble of the Strand and Piccadilly. Rainey found it restful and soothing. He employed a chauffeur, but drove for himself most of the time and generally alone.

This particular drive which Rainey indulged in every afternoon, when he could manage it, was probably the sanest accomplishment of the twenty-four hours, so far as he was concerned.

Long ago his friends had ceased to be surprised at anything Mills Rainey did. Rather, they were wont to look for something crazy and spectacular. Which was the logical result of the young man's constant efforts to escape from the boredom of too much money—too much ease.

Somehow, everything Rainey started, even though it began in a perfectly normal manner, sooner or later took a twist which threw it into the class of the unusual or the absurd. He told himself that he craved normality—that he wanted to be “regular” and all that. Whether or not he really did is an open question. Up to date he had not succeeded.

His latest effort in the direction of becoming a safe and sane British subject was getting himself what he termed “almost engaged” to Barbara van Alstyn. The two had been tremendous friends for years, and the members of the circle in which they moved had long looked for a match. It was felt that Barbara would turn out to be Rainey’s salvation, if they should marry.

It was the very fact that he had known Barbara forever that caused Mills to hesitate about proposing. He did not know whether he loved her. It was certain that she stirred him with her dreamy eyes and soft languidness. And it might well be that she loved him. But Rainey held much communion with himself over the matter.

Somehow he could not imagine himself married to her, and he could not but entertain doubts as to the sincerity of his feelings. He cursed himself for this wavering, but could not get away from it. Therefore he had been really afraid to take the plunge and ask Barbara to become his wife.

But on this mellow afternoon, as he deftly kept his position in the stately parade through the park, he was not thinking of Barbara. Nor of anything in particular. His mind was a delicious void. He was only conscious of being lapped by balmy air, of thin sunshine, of blue haze and the substantial, throbbing life of the West End.

It was when he was clear of the park and easing along Kensington Gardens in the vicinity of Lancaster Gate, that something occurred to jolt him out of the reverie into which he had fallen. The something was a girl’s face. And above it was the dazzlingly white ruffle of a nursemaid’s cap.

Its owner, smartly uniformed, was seated on a bench—in full and complete authority over a shining perambulator occupied by a dimpled bundle of humanity about eighteen months along on the road to trouble.

The beauty of the girl’s face so startled Rainey that, involuntarily, he threw out the clutch, and his sudden slackening of speed brought upon him a hoarse growl from the driver of a delivery van in the rear. Rainey came to himself, and a second later was well past the vision that had drawn his attention.

What he had seen in that brief space embraced a softly curving cheek, tanned to a light olive; a provoking little nose, red lips and laughing eyes of deep hazel. Hair the color of old gold struggled to escape the confines of the jaunty cap.

Taken together, these had produced upon Rainey an effect of piquant, glowing beauty, the like of which he could not remember ever having seen.

“By Jove!” he murmured to himself. “By Jove! What a beauty! It’s a pity that such a face had to go to a nursemaid when some of my Park Lane friends need something like that so desperately. What a jolly little trick she was. Ah, well!” And Rainey stepped on the gas.

II.

THUS began a period of distant worship of a pretty face. Each afternoon for the next week Rainey saw her. He looked for her, in fact.

As he approached Lancaster Gate he would slow down, and always she was in the same spot. He did everything he could think of—hooted the siren, opened the cut-out, jammed on the brakes with a great screeching—to make her look at him. But to no avail. She went calmly about her business of fussing with the infant as if there were no such thing in the world as a millionaire admirer.

But each day Rainey found something fresh to add to his growing enthusiasm. A glimpse of a dainty hand with slender fingers, an impression of cool firmness about her face and throat. He felt sometimes as if he simply *must* kiss her.

Then he told himself what a fool he was to bother his head about her. Most likely she was the sweetheart of the under gardener at whichever of the big houses that employed her. And yet, more than once he was tempted to have an accident of some

sort directly in front of her, in order to secure a good close-up and, perhaps, talk to her. She grew on him in spite of himself.

On the eighth day, as he crawled past, Rainey was unreasonably shocked to see that the girl was not alone. That is to say, a large limousine was drawn up to the curb before her and she was carrying on a laughing conversation with the dapper chauffeur. He had no passengers, and just as Rainey drew out of vision he saw the girl glance at a tiny wrist watch and nod vigorously to her companion.

A pang of something like jealousy shot through him. He had a wild desire to go back and punch the fellow. It seemed to make it worse because he had recognized the empty car as the property of Sir Horace Kenly.

The Kenly girls, Mildred and Clare, were old friends of Rainey. What right had their miserable chauffeur to butt in—what utter nonsense!

Then came the big idea!

It was quite in keeping with the long string of freak notions that smote him from time to time. Another Rainey stunt, his friends would have said.

Early next morning Rainey journeyed to his tailors, an old Bond Street firm. When he left the partners alternately laughed and shook their heads for ten minutes. And for the next three days the cause of it foreswore his afternoon drive through the park. Instead, he lurked about his club, drank whisky and played shockingly bad billiards.

III.

ON the fourth day, when Rainey and his car again appeared in the fashionable procession, it is doubtful if any of the occupant's friends would have recognized him without a close scrutiny. The reason being that Rainey was clad in the trim uniform of a high-class chauffeur.

Dark gray, the material was, and his legs were incased in faultlessly fitting black leather leggings. With his close-cropped hair, merry blue eyes, and slender body—well, he made a pretty snappy chauffeur.

"Ought to stand a chance against that lad of Kenly's," he grinned to himself.

Rainey had worked it all out. You had to fight fire with fire. He reasoned that if he had succeeded in attracting the attention of the nursemaid goddess before she probably would have shied off from an obvious effort to flirt on the part of a gentleman. But as a chauffeur, as an individual in her own class, so to speak, he ought to get on.

If she would chatter with one chauffeur, why not another? Thus, having made up his mind, Rainey went straight to it.

She was there, and no cars or people were parked near by. So the coast was clear. A block or so away the schemer stopped and monkeyed with the needle valve sufficiently to develop a respectable cough in the engine. Which fully warranted his action in halting the car in front of his unconscious quarry in order to make an examination.

And when he threw back the bonnet he noted from the corner of his eye that he had the girl's attention. As he fussed about, adjusting the valve, he felt that she was watching him. So when he had finished he looked up so quickly as to take her by surprise.

He grinned and was rewarded by a smile so sweet that it almost took away his breath.

"It's a rare afternoon," he ventured.

"Wonderful," returned the girl. "What's wrong with the motor?"

"Valve out of order," he said. "It's all right now, I think. If you didn't have your hands full I'd ask you to ride a bit."

"Ah! Would you?" she said coyly. "What makes you think I'd go?"

"Well, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," doubtfully, "perhaps. But wouldn't you be in for it if your gov'nor saw us, though?"

"No chance of that. I always know where he keeps himself. When will you come for a spin with me?"

"Never—silly! What do you take me for?"

"I know. But, honest, I want to take you. I've seen you here every day for a long time. But I never got the nerve to speak to you before. And most likely wouldn't have to-day if the engine hadn't gone cranky."

"You've seen me here for a long time?" she said. "How long?"

"Oh, a very long time—almost two weeks!"

"You must have been frightfully anxious to talk to me if it took you all that time to get started."

She was laughing at him, and it made him angry. But he swallowed the sharp retort that sprang to his tongue.

"Look here," he said, "you must have some time off. I'll pick you up anywhere you say. And at any time."

"How can you do that? What about your chief?"

"Oh, he's out of town just now. Will be for a couple of weeks. So I can use the old boat when I like."

"Nice old boat, all right."

"You're jolly right, it is! Please, now. When will you come out. Come on this evening. We'll run out to Richmond. There's a moon—"

"I couldn't go to-night. Perhaps to-morrow night—if I thought—oh, I don't know—do you really want me to go?"

Her eyes were teasing him. "All right. You'll come, then," he said briskly. "I'll pick you up here, then, shall I? What time?"

"My, but you're sudden! Perhaps I—very well, then. Here—at seven. To-morrow night."

IV.

SHE was waiting when Rainey drove up next evening. He was relieved to note that, off duty, she dressed in good taste. In a sports jacket of light material, a close-fitting hat of brown straw, and tan pumps, she was quite as engaging as in the trim nursemaid's costume with which he had come to associate her.

She climbed in beside him and the big car rolled away toward Putney Bridge.

"I was just thinking," Rainey said, "that it's about time we swapped names. Mine's Mills."

"Everybody calls me Peggy," she returned. "That is, my friends call me Peggy." She smiled into his eyes.

"All right—Peggy," he said. "Do you like to go fast?"

"Love it!"

The car shot forward in response to Rainey's footwork, and soon they were bowling merrily over the smooth, straight course of the Richmond turnpike. The soft evening air, touched with the scent of late summer flowers, rushed past them in perfumed waves and here and there winking lights turned the purple twilight into fairyland.

They moved too swiftly for successful conversation, but Peggy nestled close and the pressure of her slender arm, where it touched his, was enough to induce an atmosphere of cozy intimacy quite as effective in sweeping aside barriers as any amount of chatter would have been. So that when they arrived at Richmond and Rainey brought the car to a stop on the heights overlooking the river they felt like old friends.

For a long time they sat there, watching the dusk steal over the water. What they said was of little moment. The atmosphere was not conducive to the banter Rainey felt the situation called for. And it was pleasant to sit quietly in the gathering darkness.

Besides, something about the girl by his side stirred strange emotions within him. She seemed so dainty and fragile and possessed of a compelling charm that needed no words to emphasize it. Each appeared to be waiting for the other to open some line of conversation, and each seemed to fear that to do so would break the spell of the night.

Finally she touched his arm. "Let's go back now," she said quietly.

Rainey turned the car toward the city. He drove more slowly than on the outward trip. More and more he was conscious of a subtle quality about the girl—one that commanded his respect.

He was a little annoyed. Things had gone wrong somehow. The sprightly evening he had visualized in the beginning had not materialized.

He wondered if Peggy was bored—she was so quiet. She must have expected him to try to make love to her. And he wanted to. But it didn't seem to fit in. He caught himself dreading the possibility of a rebuff.

A rebuff—from a nursemaid to win whose interest he had been obliged to disguise himself as a chauffeur!

The thought came to him—he had sought a chauffeur's license. And now was afraid to avail himself of it! He laughed aloud at the idea. Peggy started as if she too had been recalled from a mental wandering.

"And what might it be all about?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing. That is—I don't know exactly. I just laughed, that's all."

She laughed too. A little rippling laugh that Rainey liked. He slipped his arm about her shoulders, but she reached up and disengaged his hand.

"Please don't," she said. "It has been so nice. Don't spoil it."

Rainey felt rebuked and angry with himself for feeling rebuked. He put on more speed.

"Where shall I take you?" he inquired.

She said, "Just drop me where you picked me up."

V.

RAINEY pondered over his experience for a long time that night. It had not turned out at all as he had planned. The whole thing had been inspired by a desire for a lark of the most frivolous nature. The idea of taking the girl seriously had not for a moment occurred to him. And here he had done just that. However, she had promised to go out with him two days later.

Their next drive found Peggy in a totally different mood. She was teeming with fun and made ridiculous comments on everything that came up. Rainey was more fascinated than ever.

He squeezed Peggy's hand, and she laughed and held it up grandly for him to kiss. But she wriggled away when he sought to kiss her lips.

Many other trips followed. Peggy seemed always glad to go, and Rainey accounted for his own leisure by reporting that his employer had extended his sojourn abroad. Once they passed Barbara van Alstyn in her car and Rainey bent forward quickly and earnestly examined the instrument board, although it is doubtful if Barbara

would have recognized him in the uniform he wore.

As for Barbara, Rainey neglected her frightfully. Sitting beside Peggy in itself gave him more of a thrill than any aspect of Barbara's stately beauty.

He found himself comparing the two without taking into consideration the difference in their stations. To him Peggy ceased to be a nursemaid and became just a jolly little pal. But always she kept him at a distance.

VI.

It was on one of Peggy's afternoons off. They had run out to Kingston early, taking along a basket lunch. Rainey put the car in a garage and they crossed the river into Home Park. A secluded corner in the shadow of an ivy-hung wall provided a capital spot for their meal.

When they had finished Peggy sat with her back against a tree and Rainey threw himself on the grass at her feet. The air about them was soft and bore the scent of blossoms; birds sang in the trees above.

Rainey looked at the picture she made. About her was an aura of sweet wholesomeness. Something within him was touched that never had been touched before. Even while he was telling himself that there was no reason in it at all he found himself saying, as in a dream: "Peggy, Peggy dear! I love you! I love you!" Over and over he repeated the words while Peggy gazed at him in frank astonishment.

"Peggy, darling," Rainey whispered, drawing her unresisting hand into his, "will you marry me, Peggy? Will you be my own little Peggy all the rest of our lives? Please—Peggy!"

He drew her head close, kissed her lips. "I do love you, Mills," she murmured, "and I'll marry you whenever you like."

"Whenever you like," Rainey caught at the words. Instantly he was alert.

"Oh, Peggy—a wonderful idea! Let's do it now. We've got time to get a special license and be married at the registry this afternoon. Will you? You said whenever I liked. And that's *now*!"

Peggy looked startled and demurred. But in the end she yielded. And the trip back

to town certainly constituted Rainey's record for the distance.

VII.

At the registry office he realized with a shock that he did not know Peggy's full name, and that all she knew of his was Mills. Laughingly he drew her aside and fortified himself with the necessary information.

"Peggy Bolles Gresham," she said. But he decided not to tell her more about himself until after the ceremony.

In the confusion, and because Rainey himself transacted all of the business with the clerk, she did not appear to notice that the surname of the groom went down as Rainey instead of Mills. Thirty minutes later they went out to the car, climbed in and sat there feeling foolishly uncertain as to the immediate future. It was Peggy who dragged Rainey back to something approaching sanity.

With eyes full of mischief she said: "I don't know what plans you've made for your bride, Mills dear. But I must go to the house to say I'm through and get my clothes." She laughed gayly.

"What house is it? You never told me where you worked, you know."

She jolted him with: "It's Sir Horace Kenly's. I took care of Lady Kenly's little granddaughter, you see."

Rainey swung the car into the traffic. This was a good one! Mills Rainey, driving up to the Kenly home with the family nursemaid as his blushing bride!

Come after her clothes. Back door, of course. And he in the attire of a chauffeur! He wondered if Mildred and Clare Kenly would catch a glimpse of him, perchance. Chuckling, he drove on.

VIII.

THE car swung into the Kenly grounds and up to the rear entrance indicated by Peggy. Rainey guessed he was unobserved. He didn't care, anyway.

Peggy bade him wait in the car, and disappeared into the house. Perhaps ten

minutes later she beckoned him from the doorway.

"Come. Hurry up!" she called excitedly. "You must help me."

She piloted him swiftly along a corridor, opened a closed door and ushered him into a small sewing room. A burst of laughter greeted him and he was facing Mildred and Clare Kenly, dancing gleefully about, evidently mad with excitement and merriment! On the table was a bottle of champagne and four freshly filled glasses.

Rainey swept the scene with wondering eyes.

From Peggy: "Oh, girls! See what I've dragged in! Look at it! Isn't it nice? All married, 'n' everything! Can't you bow for the ladies, Mills?"

Somehow they managed to convey to Rainey the true state of affairs. It came disconnectedly, but the substance of it was that Peggy was an old friend of the Kenly girls. She had come on a visit and one day had volunteered to take their sister Cora's baby into the park, because of the absence of the regular nursemaid. Peggy, being something of a madcap, had worn the maid's uniform, just as a lark. And when the girl's illness lingered Peggy kept on with her self-appointed task and stuck to the costume as a protection against flirts, as she put it.

Two days after Rainey had appeared in his chauffeur's rig the three girls had seen him in the lobby of a theater and Peggy had recognized him in spite of his evening dress. She told the others about the park episode and they put their heads together over the business.

Knowing Rainey as they did, the Kenlys concluded that the young man was up to his old tricks. Therefore they plotted to encourage his little whim for the edification of all three. No one had exactly foreseen the happy ending. But when Peggy had burst in upon them to say that she had a perfectly good husband in tow—well, what about drinking the health of somebody or other?

A minute later Peggy was smothered in the arms of Mills. He released her and fell upon Mildred and Clare. "I've got a chauffeur's license!" he declared.